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60th year of publication

How Harper won the election

Harry der Nederlanden

"How Harper won the election" – this was one of the headlines (*Globe and Mail*) on the day after. Perhaps, however, the experts and pundits do much better when they're looking in the rearview mirror. When they were looking ahead, their vision was considerably less than 20/20. No commentator that I'm aware of foresaw with any degree of accuracy the course of this campaign and its outcome.

But not too many commentators are eating humble pie. They are too busy talking to eat – busy telling Harper what he must do next. Had he followed their sage counsel, however, he would not be choosing his cabinet now; he would be back in Calgary working for some oil company.

Jack Layton, Stephen Harper, and Paul Martin

When Harper and Layton brought about the downfall of the Liberal government, few of us could understand the almost carnival atmosphere in Ottawa. 'Nobody wants a Christmas election campaign,' cried the journalists. 'The voters will surely punish those who have imposed this trial upon them.'

'Is Harper daft?' asked some. 'Canadians have a short memory, especially about scandals; Martin will only be returned to power – perhaps this time with a majority.'

'Is Layton out of his mind? With a Liberal minority, he is the king-maker. Why spoil a good thing? There's no way he is going to improve NDP fortunes.'

'Here we go again,' was the almost universal attitude among the press. 'A repeat of the last election.'

The media snickered about how stiff Harper appeared in the early television ads, and when he kept capturing attention with a steady diet of policy announcements, they speculated that the Liberals were being canny in saving their ammunition for later.

When, after a brief surge, the Liberals regained ground, it was because voters were remembering that Harper had feet of clay, mired in the scary right-wing evangelical politics. 'Wait and see: this is going to be a really nasty campaign,' they said. 'One side will scream Corruption! And the other side Scary!' And, at least during the last week of the campaign, they were right.

But no one foresaw the inroads that Harper and the Conservatives would suddenly begin making in Duceppe country. After the last round of debates, the pundits were generally agreed that Duceppe was the biggest winner in the debates and that Layton bored everyone with his repetitive message. Some figured Layton would probably be looking for another job after the elections.

Then when the polls showed the Conservatives gaining momentum, journalists fell all over themselves predicting 'a conservative tsunami.' As a result, the Conservative victory could be reported almost as a failure: although they won more seats than they've had since their virtual disappearance, in the light of a predicted majority, the results were a disappointment.

According to the late-night commentators, the real winner was Layton – because he ran a smart campaign. He stayed on message. "Boring" turned out to be smart.

So this past campaign delivered many surprises:

The way the early weeks were dominated by strategically released Conservative policy statements, beginning with the GST cut. (Will it pass?)

The way the Liberals, after a slow start, scrambled for a theme, hop-scotching from one issue to another as if grasping at straws. (At one point, Martin even tried on the "values" theme, stealing ideas from south of the border.)

The steady, calm, determined pursuit by the NDP for third-party status. (Which the pundits saw as folly.)

The ability of Harper to appear Ministerial while Martin looked flustered and panicked. (For the television commentators, image is all that matters.)

Continued on page 2...

Palestinian woman casts her vote

Democratic elections in Palestine gives power to terrorist organization

Harry der Nederlanden

Two days after Canadians went to the polls, so did Palestinians – and they did so in even greater numbers. Over 77 percent of the Palestinian people lined up to cast their votes in what has been reported as a peaceful, fair election. That compares to a not-quite 70 percent turnout in Canada, which was almost 10 points higher than the last one. Palestinians were excited, for it is the first time they've had a genuine choice between two parties. The 1996 elections were boycotted by the party that won the majority this time – Hamas.

Hamas was then and still is considered to be a terrorist organization by Canada and by most other countries in the world. Its constitution commits it to the destruction of Israel, and it has been responsible for dozens of suicide bombings that have taken hundreds of Israeli lives.

Both Israel and the US have stated in no uncertain terms that they will refuse to negotiate with Hamas unless it rescinds its stated objective of annihilating Israel, renounces terrorism and turns in its weapons. So the prospect that Hamas will form the next

Continued on page 3...

News

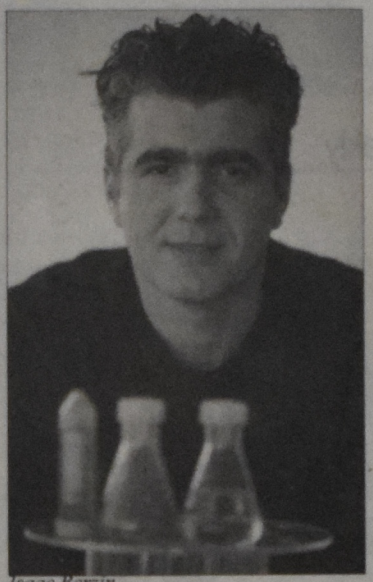
Algae like a breath mint for smokestacks

Mark Clayton

BOSTON – Isaac Berzin is a big fan of algae. The tiny, single-celled plant, he says, could transform the world's energy needs and cut global warming.

Overshadowed by a multi-billion-dollar push into other "clean-coal" technologies, a handful of tiny companies are racing to create an even cleaner, greener process using the same slimy stuff that thrives in the world's oceans.

Enter Dr. Berzin, a rocket scientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. About three years ago, while working on an experiment for growing algae on the International Space Station, he came up with the idea for using it to clean up power-plant exhaust.



Isaac Berzin

If he could find the right strain of algae, he figured he could turn the nation's greenhouse-gas-belching power plants into clean-green generators with an attached algae farm next door.

"This is a big idea," Berzin says, "a really powerful idea."

And one that's taken him to the top – a rooftop. Bolted onto the exhaust stacks of a brick-and-glass 20 megawatt power plant behind MIT's campus are rows of fat, clear tubes, each with green algae soup simmering inside.

Fed a generous helping of CO2-laden emissions, courtesy of the power plant's exhaust stack, the algae grow quickly even in the wan rays of a New England sun. The cleansed exhaust bubbles skyward, but with 40 percent less CO2 (a larger cut than the Kyoto treaty mandates) and another bonus: 86 percent less nitrous oxide.

After the CO2 is soaked up like a sponge, the algae is harvested daily. From that harvest, a combustible vegetable oil is squeezed out: biodiesel for automobiles. Berzin hands a visitor two vials – one with algal biodiesel, a clear, slightly yellowish liquid, the other with the dried green flakes that remained. Even that dried remnant can be further reprocessed to create ethanol, also used for transportation.

Being a good Samaritan on air quality usually costs a bundle. But Berzin's pitch is one hard-nosed utility executives and climate-change skeptics might like: It can make a tidy profit.

"You want to do good for the environment, of course, but we're not forcing people to do it for that reason – and that's the key," says the founder of GreenFuel Technologies, in Cambridge, Mass. "We're showing them how they can help the environment and make money at the same time."

GreenFuel has already garnered $11 million in venture capital funding and is conducting a field trial at a 1,000 megawatt power plant owned by a major southwestern power company. Next year, GreenFuel expects two to seven more such demo projects scaling up to a full production system by 2009.

Even though it's early yet, and may be a long shot, "the

Election ... *continued*

The way the Conservative Party appeared to join in a bidding war with the two parties to the left, promising so much in social programs that even the NDP was taken aback. (This may yet come back to haunt the Conservatives, for they also promised tax cuts.)

That Martin was unable to convince Canadians that Harper was a scary guy – even though Martin himself looked scared.

That someone who speaks French with a Calgary accent could make inroads among Quebecers. (In the future will it be the center, specifically greater Toronto, that will feel alienated from the rest of the country?)

Post-election commentary

Andrew Coyne of the *National Post* trumpeted the end of the Liberal Empire. As he sees it, the Canadian public only had to begin to believe that there was a viable alternative to Liberal rule and Liberal corruption for the tide to turn.

"All that remained," he wrote, "was to show that there was indeed a government in waiting, a safe pair of hands, ready to take the wheel."

Not everyone is sure Harper can be trusted to steer Canada, he admits. Many in central and eastern Canada are not at all sure.

Coyne, however, looks forward to cooperation between the Conservatives and NDP in putting together a reform package that will make government more accountable. (Actually, had the old rules only been enforced, Adscam would never have happened.)

Coyne sees the elections as a personal triumph for Harper. Few had seen him as capable of uniting the right; now he may actually succeed in creating greater national unity that includes Quebec as well as the West.

Looking back over the campaign, Jeffrey Simpson (*Globe and Mail*) sees "a small, parochial, even self-absorbed country." None of the candidates devoted attention to any of a host of global issues – from Iraq and Iran to global poverty and AIDS. And while the Liberals tried to get mileage out of vilifying the US, Harper had to keep mum for fear of appearing too friendly toward our nearest neighbor and ally.

Ibbitson infers that this is because the rest of the world doesn't matter to Canadians. We're even more self-absorbed than the Americans, who are very concerned with foreign policy.

Is this true? Or is it merely the case that our three major parties largely share the same outlook on the world – that we are generously inclined over toward others – as long as it doesn't cost us too much.

Perhaps, too, a country so committed to multiculturalism with many nationalities within its borders can only commit itself to a diffuse, unfocused internationalism.

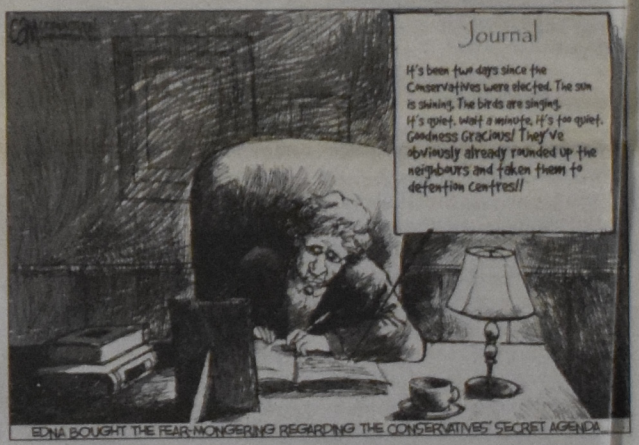
John Ibbitson (*Globe and Mail*), looking over the slim Tory victory, muses that Harper must be aware that he has been given only a limited mandate. Yet, Ibbitson contends, a definite shift has taken place in terms of our national perspective.

The elections represent a shift westward, a change in the national mindset that looks across the Pacific to China and India as well as eastward across the Atlantic to Europe. (Are Albertans straining to look across the Rockies? Or are they looking southward to US oil markets?)

The elections also signal a reduced role for Ottawa, thinks Ibbitson: "a federal government that sticks to its constitutional knitting, focusing on defense, foreign relations, justice, the border, and leaving provincial governments free to deal with their national resources, their healthcare, education, transportation systems and their cities...."

I'll have to see it to believe it. Canadians are too used to looking to the federal government to fix whatever needs fixing. And what about all those promises?

Robert Fulford (*National Post*) suggests that the first duty of the Conservative Party should be to restore faith in government and to "create a new tone of civility in Parliament." That isn't asking for the impossible, it seems to me, and it would keep politicians from looking like a bunch of pirates quarreling over the spoils.


Journal
It's been two days since the Conservatives were elected. The sun is shining. The birds are singing. It's quiet. Wait a minute. It's too quiet. Goodness Gracious! They've obviously already rounded up the neighbours and taken them to detention centres!!
EDNA BOUGHT THE FEAR-MONGERING REGARDING THE CONSERVATIVES' SECRET AGENDA

Fulford also charges his fellow conservatives with reviving the dismal state of our defence forces, reorganizing healthcare and relieving Canadians of some of their onerous tax burden. (After all the promises made and in view of the need to govern as a minority, that's no small order.)

Fulford made one remark that especially struck me. He observed that in the past our approach to healthcare has been driven too much by ideology. Most Canadians, however, would associate Harper, not the Liberals, with ideology. Can Harper change that perception?

Back to the title I began with: "What Harper must do." Brian Laghi, Ottawa Bureau Chief for the *Globe and Mail*, suggested basically that Harper must keep "evolving." Leaving his radicalism and his scary conservatism behind, he must emphasize the "more moderate portions of his agenda ... to build bridges into large portions of the country that still have misgivings about him and his party."

He can't move quickly in controversial areas, says Laghi, meaning: Dump the social conservative agenda – same-sex marriage, abortion, stem-cell guidelines, Senate reform and so on.

In other words: evolve into a good Canadian liberal (without a capital L).

A *Globe and Mail* editorial warned: "Canada did not endorse neo-conservatism when they elected [Harper] last night. They voted against a Liberal Party that had become smug and arrogant." In short, Harper has the mandate to govern like a Liberal – sans the smugness and the arrogance.

I'm not sure that Mr. Harper sees it that way. Or that his supporters would sit still for that.

Algae ... *continued*

technology is quite fascinating," says Barry Worthington, executive director of US Energy Association in Washington, which represents electric utilities, government agencies, and the oil and gas industry.

One key is selecting an algae with a high oil density – about 50 percent of its weight. Because this kind of algae also grows so fast, it can produce 15,000 gallons of biodiesel per acre. Just 60 gallons are produced from soybeans, which along with corn are the major biodiesel crops today.

Greenfuel isn't alone in the algae-to-oil race. Last month, Greenshift Corporation, a Mount Arlington, N.J., technology incubator company, licensed CO2-gobbling algae technology that uses a screen-like algal filter. A prototype is capable of handling 140 cubic meters of flue gas per minute, an amount equal to the exhaust from 50 cars or a 3-megawatt power plant, Greenshift said in a statement.

For his part, Berzin calculates that just one 1,000 megawatt power plant using his system could produce more than 40 million gallons of biodiesel and 50 million gallons of ethanol a year. That would require a 2,000-acre "farm" of algae-filled tubes near the power plant. There are nearly 1,000 power plants nationwide with enough space nearby for a few hundred to a few thousand acres to grow algae and make a good profit, he says.

Energy security advocates like the idea because algae can reduce US dependence on foreign oil. "There's a lot of interest in algae right now," says John Sheehan, who helped lead the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) research project into using algae on smokestack emissions until budget cuts ended the program in 1996.

In 1990, Sheehan's NREL program calculated that just 15,000 square miles of desert (the Sonoran desert in California and Arizona is more than eight times that size) could grow enough algae to replace nearly all of the nation's current diesel requirements.

"I've had quite a few phone calls recently about it," says Mr. Sheehan. "This is not an outlandish idea at all."

Palestine ... *continued from page 1*

government in Palestine puts the peace process (what's left of it) in jeopardy.

The death of wily, corrupt Yassar Arafat, the commitment of Mahmoud Abbas, Palestine's new president, to democracy, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the formation by Ariel Sharon of a new party determined to negotiate a peace with the Palestinians had awakened glimmers of new hope. Nothing could be clearer to the Palestinian people than the fact that there is no future in continued conflict. What, then, has caused this surprising turn to Hamas for leadership?

Until a few weeks ago, Hamas was not in the running at all. The election seemed to be sewn up by Fatah – if only it could get its act together. The party has always been riven by factions, but as the elections approached Fatah teetered on the brink of disintegration as the old guard, those who were associated with Yassar Arafat, were challenged by those who grew up in the refugee camps. For a while it looked as if Fatah would be unable to agree on a single slate of candidates.

Hamas has been much better organized and disciplined. It is a religious Islamist party as opposed to Fatah, which wants a secular state. Besides launching suicide bombers at Israel, Hamas has also developed well-organized social services for a hapless, needy people. Hamas runs preschools, youth clubs, free health clinics and provides food for the needy. It is also seen to be free of corruption.

This is in stark contrast to Fatah, which has a very bad reputation for incompetence as well as corruption. Palestinians were hopeful that Abbas would establish order so that the Palestinian economy could begin to recover. That has not happened. Security in Palestine, especially in Gaza, has deteriorated badly. Numerous factions armed to the teeth compete for position.

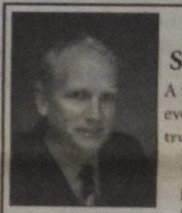
As Martin Peretz wrote recently in The National Post, "The Palestinian Authority may be the most heavily armed force in Gaza. But militias still battle police, police battle other police, gangs brawl with other gangs. There are revenge killings, kidnappings, bombings, clubbings, mutilations.... Chaos rules in Gaza, utter mayhem."

Many of the armed gunmen are loosely associated with Fatah, but Abbas has been reluctant and unable to control them. Palestinians have grown so sick about the disorder and corruption in Fatah that concerns about negotiating with Israel and the US were not the top issue in this election. They were voting for the party that (they hope) can do away with the corruption and bring law and order to their country. Domestic issues overruled all others, according to Palestinian voters interviewed in the days prior to elections.

During the weeks leading up to the elections Hamas put away their trademark black hoods and their machine guns, and they even toned down their anti-Israeli rhetoric. Their election campaign was disciplined and effective, and in the week before the elections pollsters said they were gaining quickly on Fatah, but almost noone predicted that Hamas would win a majority. In fact, many speculated that they really did not want to form the government, because this would confront them with the difficult problem of how to deal with Israel and with those countries – which include Europe as well as America – that refuse to deal with a terrorist organization. With Fatah in control, the Palestinian Authority got considerable financial aid from abroad. Donors have warned that aid will not be forthcoming to an avowedly terrorist organization.

Changing its stripes will not be easy for Hamas, for many of its members the commitment to Israel's destruction is non-negotiable. Several Mid-east watchers have suggested that Hamas might adopt the Irish Republican Army strategy, which spun off an independent political arm, while retaining its militant wing. This would still make negotiating with Hamas very difficult, for one could never be sure whether it was negotiating in good faith or whether it was only a step in its real objective – the destruction of Israel.

We are reminded, however, that Fatah, too, began as a terrorist organization – Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, to eventually become a more or less democratic entity. This was Mahmoud Abbas' strategy all along, say some commentators. Urged to disarm Hamas, he refused, arguing that to attempt to do so would plunge Palestine into civil war. Instead, his ambition has always been to assimilate Hamas into the political process in the hopes that eventually the tiger will change its stripes after all.



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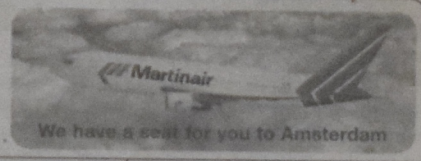

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Editorial

Speaking truth to power

Harry der Nederlanden

It is much harder to put the truth into words than we think. Most of the time we think of truth-telling simply in terms of saying what we know to be the case. It's a bit like sticking the right labels on the right things. If you faithfully match them up, you're telling the truth.

Christians know – or at least they ought to know – that it is more complicated than that. The most important things, the most fundamental parts of life and some of the most powerful forces in human existence are not simple, discrete things that you can take a snapshot of, label and file.

God in his wisdom gave us four different gospel witnesses to convey something of the truth that is Christ Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life. And the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, which seeks to give us an overview of God's work in history, is a book bursting with weird imagery and strange visions. John does not pretend that he can tell us the truth in a few dozen unambiguous propositions that fit together into a clear, coherent picture. To convey what has been revealed to him, John writes a very literate book. Revelation has a highly complex structure; it has a very artful, artificial design, one that we associate with poetry and fiction, not with journalistic truth-telling.

That doesn't always sit well with us. As orthodox believers we want to be able to nail the truth down and hold one another to it. Of course, we aren't so foolish as to think that's all there is to it. We know all too well that holding people to lifeless formulas, no matter how orthodox, is not what the Christian life is about. We know, too, that what God wants is not just people who mouth truth but people who are animated by it. Truth is not a formula; it is the Spirit of God moving in communities to inspire them to good works and to love one another.

Still, because we are sinners and fallible human beings, we also need words that set limits, that discipline us and that lead us in the narrow paths of righteousness.

As we watched the latest political campaign unfold – the debates, the policy statements, the television ads, the speeches – there wasn't a single one of us, I'm sure, who didn't despair at times at how badly truth fared in the public square. Those who supported Stephen Harper for his "social conservatism" were probably frustrated that he could not openly defend his position on same-sex marriage, develop his thoughts on abortion, or articulate other themes important to those on the right, including Christians. Those who supported Paul Martin or Jack Layton because their parties have traditionally been quicker to redistribute the common wealth to those unable to provide for themselves and their children and to protect the environment were also probably disappointed. Citizens for Public Justice pointed out that some issues like refugees, global poverty and AIDS did not figure high on the agenda for any of the candidates.

We all know something of how campaigns are conducted nowadays. Behind the candidates there are cadres of experts and advisors telling them how to comport themselves and what phrases will catch the interest of the voting public, whose attention span is extremely short and who are driven primarily by self-interest.

It may be important at election time for a people to be made aware of their country's situation in the global economy, the state of the nation itself, what long-term trends are impacting their lives and what crises are looming on the horizon. But such serious analysis would turn the voters off. The candidate would be labelled an egg-head or a pedant, and that would be the end of his career. Parties do have idea men and women, but for the most part they operate behind the scenes. And, truth be told, most of the expertise around election time focuses not on political wisdom but political strategizing, that is, on how to manipulate the public.

So truth in the broad, comprehensive sense does not come into play in the public square at precisely the time when people ought to be reflecting on where we are headed as a nation.

But truth in the sense of depth also suffers. In fact, it is actively repressed. Martin does not speak of his deepest beliefs as a Christian and member of the Roman Catholic Church on principle. He has neatly compartmentalized his life: religion pertains to the private sphere and secular liberal politics to the public sphere.

In response to a question posed by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (www.christianity.ca), Harper, as one would expect, gives a much better account of what his faith means for his political career. But the NDP statement (written by Bill Blaikie) is also quite good. However, the EFC website is just about the only place we heard such statements giving the foundational – religious – reasons we join together to work for common ends and what kind of society we are striving for.

Harper avoided such themes because if he articulated them he'd simply prove to much of the Canadian public that he was indeed the scary right-wing fundamentalist that the Liberals have made him out to be. As for the NDP, no doubt there are still some who are motivated by a form of Christian socialism as once embodied in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, but for most of the candidates that is merely part of the history of their party.

For neither the right nor the left is it wise to spell out the worldview behind their policies too deeply. That smells of ideology. And nowadays ideology and religion are considered dangerous, divisive. Truth in this sense is seen as a source of domination and violence. It is not people-friendly.

Some of you may recognize the name of Vaclav Havel. He was the Czechoslovakian writer who, like Solzhenitsyn in Russia, had the courage to speak out against the communist regime. His writings, some written in prison, are the very antithesis of ideology. He experienced in his very body how restrictive and repressive ideology can become to the fullness and diversity of human truth. When, as the president of a free democracy, he addressed Canada's Parliament, he warned against the dangers of excessive attachment to one's own nation. He ended his speech with the adage, "While the State is a human creation, humanity is a creation of God." A truth, but only a partial truth.

In an interview with Havel, the well-known historian and journalist Timothy Garton Ash raised the question whether running for political office and being the leader of a party didn't to some extent interfere with his ability to keep speaking the truth in the passionately non-partisan way he had done when he was one of the powerless. Havel expressed confidence that holding office would not compromise his commitment to the truth and to speaking it in an unbiased way.

I know of few political leaders who have been as self-consciously and as passionately devoted to a politics of truth as Vaclav Havel. But I suspect that Ash is right in his argument with Havel about whether one can remain, at the same time, an active politician and an independent, critical intellectual.

"Havel continues to maintain that he can do both those things," said Ash years later in an interview, "that in making presidential speeches he is just continuing the essays he wrote as a playwright and oppositionist in the 1980s. I have argued that the two roles are incompatible, that you do have to choose between the one or the other, that there is a necessarily adversarial relationship between power and, to use a very large word, truth – or between the politician and the intellectual."

Ash argues that even a statesman-politician like Havel uses words in a different way: "You're using words to win votes, to secure the interests of your country."

A lawyer, writing recently for the online magazine *Slate*, explains why lawyers have a reputation for being liars. They often are, he says. That's their job. They're not supposed to go into court to lay out the whole truth in all its dimensions in a non-partisan way, let the chips fall where they may. It is their job to be advocates. They are there to make a case for their clients, to give only one side of the matter. It is up to advocates for the other side to represent that side of the truth.

Politicians too are advocates. We have a party system in which policies and positions are developed in a deliberately adversarial way. In order to make their case to the electorate and get in power, parties are not inclined to praise the wisdom and the policies of the opposition.

There is advocacy in the area of religion as well. Theologians teach us how to defend the faith that has been handed down to us. This discipline is called apologetics. But not only are there different theories about how to defend the faith, there are also different understandings of the truth revealed to us in Scripture and in Jesus Christ, varying by denomination and tradition.

That has been enough to make many, particularly in the younger generations, throw up their hands in scepticism and cry, "What is truth?"

But does the fact that in this life each of us can attain only a partial and often partisan grasp of truth, which we can communicate only obliquely and imperfectly, prove that there is no truth? No, it only goes to show that truth is much richer and greater than any one of us and any one group or any one expert or science can encompass, because we are swimming in it like a swimmer in the sea. And can a swimmer conquer the entire ocean? No, he can only let the water bear him up by cooperating with it.

The quest for truth is an endless struggle, and because truth is so vast, we need one another. And we need politics and economics, science and art, ethics and theology, and then when we try to put it all together, we need a great deal of humility.

We need to listen to one another and debate with one another. But above all we need to remember that God has spoken – with authority. And he has spoken in Jesus Christ for our good. Through faith in Christ we don't have all the answers, but in him we may be confident that truth will not destroy us. Even when it hurts, and it often does, it serves in the final analysis to set us free. Truth is what reminds us that we have a responsibility over toward and for one another, because it keeps us contending with and for God and the whole of his creation.

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EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF
Editor: Harry der Nederlanden editor@christiancourier.ca
Circulation: Rose der Nederlanden rose@christiancourier.ca
Accounts/Advertising Manager: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer ads@christiancourier.ca

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Christian Courier
1 Hiscott St, St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7
Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838
Fax: (905) 682-8313; Web site: www.christiancourier.ca
Publications Mail Registration No. 09375
We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.
Canada

Open letter on Sudan

The following letter was sent to Paul Martin as Prime Minister of Canada and signed by leaders from several Canadian faith communities, including the Christian Reformed Church.

Dear Prime Minister,

As representatives of various faith traditions in Canada, we commend the Government of Canada for the significant contributions made to support humanitarian and relief efforts in Darfur, Sudan and to assist the African Union Mission in Sudan in its efforts to provide security. People of faith in Canada have worked in solidarity with the people of Sudan for many years, developing long partnerships and collaboration.

Canadians are looking to our political leaders to continue taking steps, unilaterally, bilaterally and multilaterally, to protect communities under threat, boldly work with others to resolve the conflict, and restore peace and safety to the people of Darfur.

Therefore, as the crisis continues into a fourth year, we urge the government to include Darfur at the top of its international policy agenda, and take actions that would be effective in bringing peace and security to the people there. Thus we issue a call of deep concern to develop action to assist the suffering and vulnerable people in Darfur, Sudan.

About the crisis of contemporary Christianity

Regarding your editorial "The crisis of contemporary Christianity," January 9, 2006.

Has anyone given thought that the crisis of contemporary Christianity may be that we have lost the "Good News" focus of the gospels? The good news that the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection makes our salvation a given, a free gift of grace? There is nothing that we can do to earn it; there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to separate us from his love. This good news should, first of all, underlie all of the other pronouncements that Christians make.

It seems that so much effort of Contemporary Christianity is channeled to changing human behavior rather than in spreading the good news. It seems from most of the authors you quote that somehow the Christian faith is about a number of preconditions that we must meet in order for the good news to be real.

Could it be that the Christian faith is lost to Europe and losing North America because our focus has been on do's and don'ts, or the rules of religion, rather than on the good news? Or maybe we all have it so good that the good news just does not resonate, so we focus on the religiosity of the Christian faith rather than its core message of grace.

God's words and Word are first of all a message of love given so that we might live fully and joyfully this side of the resurrection, not as a set of rules that we must keep in order to measure up.

Christ spent very little time correcting sinners. He told them they were forgiven and he healed them. Where he spent his anger and venom were on the leaders of the church of the day, those who were concerned with "right actions and ethics," with earning salvation by being good; the good people.

This is not to denigrate good works or ethics. God did create the world in such a way that if we follow the laws for creation we will live more fully than if we ignore them. Gasoline still works better in the car's gas tank than water. If we kill, steal or covet, we will hurt one another and we will not be able to live and flourish this side of the resurrection as intended. The aim of the law of the Lord is not to constrict, but to show us the way to live fully on this earth. But we can only really do so if we accept the given that in Christ we are already "saved".

I get concerned when all we hear publicly from the Christian community are warnings about things like homosexuality and gay marriage; when the grace of God and the love of Christ is twisted to mean some right, or left wing, ideology; when preachers preach about our moral failures and how to correct them; when the focus is on "sin" and sin is usually defined as some moral failing.

If that is what Christianity is about then Christianity is not much different from any other religion based on rules for life, or right living, to make ourselves worthy of whatever God we worship. Then indeed contemporary Christianity will be in crisis, it will have lost its way. What I take comfort from is that," nothing can separate us from the love and grace of God," not even our loss of focus.

Thanks,
John Kamphof

Community Marriage Policy reduces divorce rates

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) – When pastors in Albuquerque signed a Community Marriage Policy Jan. 20, they marked the 200th city to join the movement since leaders in Modesto, Calif., signed the first one in 1986. And since Modesto launched its marriage-saving emphasis, the divorce rate there has decreased 57 percent, said Michael McManus, creator of the Community Marriage Policies.

More than 10,000 pastors in 42 states have signed Community Marriage Policies with the goal of radically reducing the divorce rate in their local churches.

"I believe that Albuquerque's divorce rate could be cut by as much as 50 percent," he said, adding that Austin and El Paso, Texas, Kansas City, Kan., Salem, Ore., and Modesto have all slashed divorce rates by 48 percent or more since signing Community Marriage Policies.

Statistics indicate that among the first 114 cities to sign the policy, divorce rates in those cities fell by 17.5 percent over seven years, which is nearly double the 9.4 percent decline in similar cities that did not sign the policy, McManus said. Such a rate was enough to save 50,000 marriages. In addition, the cohabitation rate fell by 33 percent more in marriage policy cities than in similar cities from 1990-2000.

When pastors of various denominations gather in a community to agree upon the marriage policy, they adopt six particular reforms for their congregations. First, they commit to require engaged couples to complete four to six months of premarital inventory and skills training for resolving conflict.

Also, pastors agree to have engaged couples meet with trained mentor couples to discuss those inventory results, and they agree to organize an annual marriage enrichment retreat at the church. Pastors also agree to train couples whose marriages once nearly failed to mentor those in current crisis, and they vow to encourage separated couples to complete a workbook course called "Reconciling God's Way," McManus said.

Finally, pastors who sign the marriage policy agree to help stepfamilies by creating Stepfamily Support Groups, which are known to save 80 percent of stepfamily marriages, which normally end at a 70 percent rate.

Divorce destroys wealth, study finds

Divorce can have a devastating financial impact on a person's wealth, but a steady marriage can nearly double it, according to a new study by Ohio State University.

"Divorce looks like one of the fastest ways to destroy your wealth," Jay Zagorsky, author of the study and a research assistant at Ohio State's Center for Human Resource Research, told the Associated Press.

The study, which appears in the current issue of the Journal of Sociology, looked at a nationally representative survey of 9,000 people to determine how wealth changes as a result of marriage and divorce. Researchers found that married people increased their wealth about 4 percent each year simply as a result of being married, when all other factors are constant.

Zagorsky said the study could not predict why marriage is helpful in building wealth, but sociological research indicates married people benefit because two people can live more cheaply than they could separately and because two spouses can share household responsibilities and produce more than if they were single.

Divorce reduces a person's wealth by about three-quarters, or 77 percent, compared to that of a single person, while being married almost doubles comparative wealth, or increases it by 93 percent, the study found, according to an Ohio State news release Jan. 17.

"Divorce causes a decrease in wealth that is larger than just splitting a couple's assets in half," Zagorsky said, adding that married people see an increase in wealth that is more than simply adding the assets of two single people.

"If you really want to increase your wealth, get married and stay married," he said. "On the other hand, divorce can devastate your wealth."

Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

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PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40009999
REGISTRATION NO. 9375
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U.S. Mail:
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(USPS 518-090)
Second-class postage paid at Lewiston NY
Postmaster: send address changes to: Christian Courier, Box 110
Lewiston NY 14092

Subscriptions:	**Canada (G.S.T. incl.)**	**USA**	**Overseas**
one yr. (25 issues)	$40.00	$37.00 US	$85.00
two yrs. (50 issues)	$75.00	$70.00 US	

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Tuesday, 9 a.m. (13 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site **www.christiancourier** for more details.
(ISSN 1192-3415) Published biweekly on Mondays.

Address all correspondence to: 1 Hiscott St, St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838, or fax: 905-682-8313
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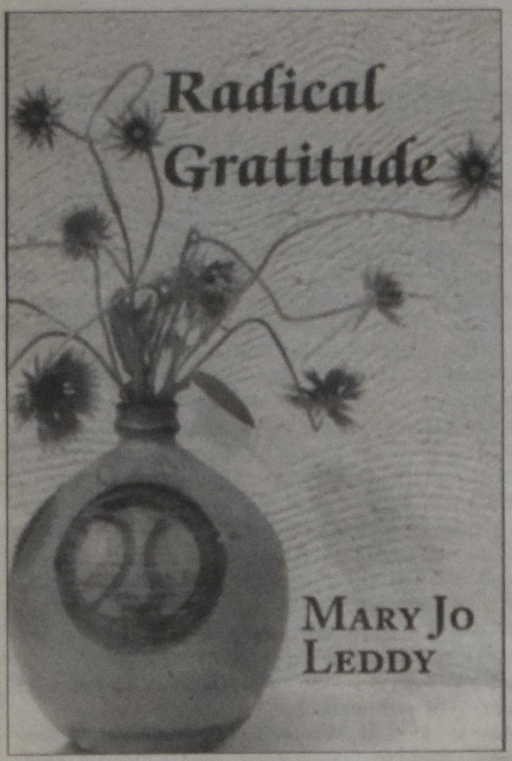

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema
Radical Gratitude
Mary Jo Leddy
(New York: Orbis Books, 2002)

Mary Jo Leddy, teacher of theology at Regis College who has lived and worked with refugees in Toronto's Romero House Community, believes that each one of us "has at least one significant word to say with our lives." She has discovered that her "word" is gratitude. Judging by the passion with which she deals with the topic in her enlightening book, she is correct.

Leddy isn't content to let her "word" be a merely personal one. Rather, she asserts, the western world, in which ingratitude is ingrained in the economic system, needs to hear about the liberating power of gratitude. Hence, her book is about "living an alternative to a driven, consumed, and consuming existence."

How does one begin to live that alternative? In other words, if, as Leddy picturesquely says, "gratitude begins as small and as real as a child," how can gratitude "grow up and walk sure in the world?"

In order to answer that question, Leddy exposes the roots of long-lasting gratitude. She cites the need to stop taking life for granted, to be gripped anew with "astonishment at the miracle of creation and of our own creation." Pointing to God as our awesome Creator, she reveals how gratitude is linked to the economy of grace and how ingratitude and dissatisfaction are linked to the culture of money.

Outlining how North America's culture of money has resulted in people being held captive to cravings, she shows that as cravings intensify, so does the sense people have that what they have is never enough. Interestingly, that sense of dissatisfaction leads to deeper discontentment. Leddy says, "'I don't have enough' becomes 'I am not enough' becomes 'I am not good enough.'"In other words, economically induced discontentment produces deep personal dissatisfaction, which metastasises into a general disappointment with other people, work, church, the world, and sometimes even with God.

In an interesting comparison Leddy shows that "captivity is as old as it is new." She recalls the biblical account of the Babylonian captivity to shed light on the dissatisfaction caused by the culture of money. Just as Israel was led into captivity because she rejected the Lord God, "we are in captivity because we have made a god out of an economic system and have worshipped it as if it were the only reality."

Though it's difficult to live in a time and place of captivity, Leddy asserts that we need not be destroyed by our culture. She says, "A time of captivity if it is recognized as such can also be a time of liberation." People have choices to make. They can either succumb to their culture or "recognize our very real captivity and weep by the rivers of memory." Religious renewal can follow such an acknowledgement.

Through relating her own stories as well as those of others, Leddy points readers into the direction of a life of radical gratitude. She spells out her view of the great economy of grace, which has "its own laws of production and distribution, supply and demand." Its inner dynamic is that "as lives and money are shared and given away there is a multiplication of resources."

People who have internalized this dynamic realize that there is enough for all, which leads to the growth of community, peace, and justice. This option "frees the imagination to think of new political and economic possibilities."

Though I don't agree completely with some of Leddy's theological beliefs which undergird her reflections, her stimulating book is well worth reading.

It helped me to recognize the cultural roots of the dissatisfaction I sometimes struggle with and gave me insights into how to battle it.

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

Get 'em while they're young!

There was an outcry when *The National Post* was being offered daily, for free, in my local university. People recognized that free newspapers given to students will not only shape their political thinking today, but direct their buying habits in the future. University years are the critical years, and decisions made during your student career are often decisions that last for life. Get 'em while they're young!

Similarly, Coke and Pepsi have been wrestling for monopolies on various campuses. Pepsi paid one student association $50,000 a year in order to remove all competing beverage companies from the campus. Why the wrangling and the big bucks? What you drink while learning, loving and growing often conditions what you drink for life. Get 'em while they're young!

Credit card companies send salespeople to campuses on a regular basis to recruit students to their name brand. You will see sales booths in busy hallways offering special prizes and bonuses to those who sign up "now." They know that if you can teach students to live on credit, these financial habits may carry on later into life. Likewise, the largest ads in student newspapers have always been those promoting local bars and party nights. Alcohol consumption is a recreational activity that can become an addiction and keep people coming back to the counter for decades. Get them while they are young, and they may become slaves for life.

Dangerous groups on campus

If you visited a campus today, you would pretty quickly realize that there is a heightened awareness for groups that do "recruiting" on campus. Significantly, most of the groups under suspicion seem to have some connection to religion. Often the chaplaincy centre will have a flyer available warning students against "aggressive" or "high pressure" religious groups on campus. Campus Crusade (now called "Campus 4 Christ" on some campuses) regularly receives vociferous protests in student newspapers after they have finished an evangelism campaign. Pro-life related groups have been banned from campuses, not to mention from promoting their cause in student newspapers.

A recent article from the Canadian University Press in York University's Excalibur states unequivocally that credits from Christian universities should not be transferable to public universities. "Someone with an education in theological science shouldn't be granted a secular degree," claims the author. Public universities have one reigning worldview that negates all others, and that is "secularism"– basically, a scientific materialist perspective. This attitude, which one might called a nonpluralistic secular imperialism, is what prejudices the government against funding for provincial schools that teach from a Christian perspective.

Dangerous ideas on campus

It is true that some religious groups can be manipulative. Cults weasel their way on to unwary campuses because they know some young people are impressionable, away from home for the first time, lonely, and anxious about this new experience of freedom and learning.

But take note of what I'm describing above: self-interested corporate powers run free on the campus – some with monopolies on the market, while faith, and the Christian faith in particular at times, is regarded with suspicion. This creates a "chill" around chaplaincy offices – a climate of uneasiness. Some campus ministers feel obligated to say outright to students: "Don't worry, we won't try to convert you" in order to waylay distrust.

The university, however, (or "multiversity" as it is better described) has become a marketplace of ideas and lifestyles. The feminists proselytize in their sociology classes, the capitalists persuade with passion in their business classes, and the environmentalists criticize and mobilize from their classrooms.

Why not speak with conviction about a man who healed and gave hope to millions by giving up his very life as a demonstration of love and sacrifice? Someone whose Spirit doesn't leave a student violently ill the morning after?

This Christian voice on campus comes in different tones and pitches, I realize. But it can be a valuable voice in conversations on the role of women, the market, and the environment, and not in a way that makes these variables the fulcrum of social life.

Perhaps that idea is threatening to some, but this faith need not be hidden in the shadows of the student newspaper and broader campus activities. Students are impressionable, no doubt. But they are not naive. Many are very critical and independent thinkers, and do not need to be protected by administrative censure and banning. Having conscientious professors and an active campus ministries centre is the best ingredient in forming a culture of discernment at a school. Because religious groups are by no means the only proselytizers on campus. They may not even be the most pernicious.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario

Election reflections by the Christian Heritage Party

Christians have a right to be disappointed in the outcome of the 39th federal election – but not a right to be bitter. We must remember what we have always said when trying to persuade voters to abandon 'strategic voting':

"It is God who raises up and puts down governments."

And there is reason to be hopeful in anticipating the performance of this new government. It is, after all, a 'new' party, in spite of some old faces. It is untainted with the kind of scandal that helped bring down the Liberals. The new Prime Minister is a Christian; so are many of the probable members of his cabinet: people like Maurice Vellacott, Garry Breitkreutz, Stockwell Day, Jason Kenney, Monte Solberg and others. Often, they've troubled us by their tendency to keep faith and policy in separate, air-tight compartments.

So that's exactly what should set the tone of our response to this new government: me must pray, and pray hard, that God will show them how to integrate faith and policy without arousing fears that they mean to abuse the power of government to favor one faith and suppress others. That fear – which has also unjustly plagued the CHP – has been a bugaboo for the Reform Party, the Canadian Alliance, and Stephen Harper's Conservatives. In neither case has it been true; but fears are seldom overcome by facts. Only performance will quell the anxiety – and bigotry – of militant Secularists.

Because we believe God puts people in positions of authority, we can be grateful for the actual numbers involved: no party has the weight to sway public policy by numbers alone. Whatever direction policy takes in Ottawa, it's going to have to be moved by persuasion – and by Divine intervention in response to the prayers of God's people.

We can also be grateful that the Bloc Québecois didn't achieve it's 50 per cent goal; indeed, its performance was eerily reminiscent (in numbers, not in scandal) of the Chrétien Liberals — with 42 per cent of the vote, they captured 60 per cent of the seats in Québec.

The BQ and the Liberals were the major obstacles to proportional representation; the Canadian Alliance was in favor of modernizing our elections, and we can expect that the Tories will be, too; so was the NDP. It may, at last, be a change whose time has come.

There are crucial issues that the CHP tried to get onto the agenda for this election: defending democracy and the Constitution from judicial activism; the sanctity of human life and the traditional definition of marriage; child-care focused on the family, not institutional day-care; labor peace; rising international concerns involving human rights; the environment; the sorry plight of the family farm as Canadian agriculture faces a "perfect storm" of rising input costs, declining markets in the face of unfair subsidies, and a rising dollar; and many, many more. But in the end, the public's desire to oust the tired Liberals took precedence over everything else.

The CHP will raise those issues again at the next election. We will not quit. But in the meantime – and especially right now in the transition phase – the Biblical response to all Canada's problems is to pray for wisdom and grace for our new government. We must never forget the Apostle's exhortation to his young protégé, Timothy:

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."

Let that be our guide as Stephen Harper and the Conservatives take up their awesome responsibilities. May God guide them.

The Christian Heritage Party is Canada's only pro-life, pro-family federal political party, and the only federal party that unashamedly endorses the 'supremacy of God' clause in the Canadian Constitution.

To learn more, call toll-free 1-888-VOTE CHP (1-888-868-3247) or visit our web site at www.chp.ca

Ron Gray – CHP Leader

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

Being stewardly about funerals

As I write this article I'm reflecting on the life of a friend and sister in the Lord who recently passed on and whose funeral I'm planning to attend tomorrow. I'm confident that she died 'in the Lord and that despite the tears shed, it will be a service of celebration for a faithful servant gone to be with her Lord and Saviour.

Why write about this topic here? The question of what is good stewardship when it comes to funeral arrangements comes up frequently enough in my work with deacons. In fact, a few years ago, I was asked to prepare a workshop on this subject for the Quinte Diaconal Conference. I was surprised how many people signed up for this workshop.

What it comes down to is this: make preparations in advance. Don't leave it to your loved ones. Leaving the funeral arrangements and decisions to your family is stressful and invites poor stewardship. It can also lead to conflicts and hurt feelings.

For instance, my wife and I both feel that spending money on an expensive coffin is, for us, poor stewardship. Others will feel differently. It's not that we value the money so much, but it is money that can be put to better use for Kingdom work instead of being expended for something soon to be buried. But imagine the talk if my wife dies and I act on her desire to be placed into a simple unfinished wooden box! What would people think of me when they attend her funeral? Would they equate my actions as 'cheap' or even stronger, unloving? After all the line used to persuade us otherwise is: "Don't you want the best for the dearly departed?"

This, I hope, illustrates the vulnerability that we face when we have to make arrangements for a funeral. Restraint or good practical stewardship is subordinated to emotion and the visible demonstrations of love exhibited (or measured by others) in the quality of the funeral and the money spent on it: the quantity of flowers, the quality of the casket, the funeral director services, etc. It is hard to be businesslike and practical when you are coping with the loss of someone you love. Funerals are very public and we are conscious that others are watching what we do.

In order to lift that burden from your loved ones; make sure they know what your desires are ahead of time. But, be warned, simply writing your wishes into your Will won't work. The Will is often opened after the funeral is long over. Rather, make sure your spouse and your alternate trustee(s) have a written copy of your instructions and that they know where to find it.

Another good thing to do is to pre-arrange your own funeral. There are Memorial Societies you can join that have different packages of services you can purchase and which come into effect as soon as you pass away. At the time of your passing, your family only needs to make one call and your wishes are respected. Doing it in advance instead of leaving it to your family saves them the hassle and the emotional burden of making decisions when they are less able to do so.

Here's a simple list of some of the details. Ask your Pastor or other leaders in your congregation for a trusted funeral director who can help you to determine your options in your area. Consider the following:

- Cremation or burial? If the latter, where: plot purchase; vaulted or non-vaulted?
- Type of casket: simple, medium, or high level of quality, etc.
- Funeral Director services: embalming, motorcade, funeral home use for visiting/chapel service etc.
- Funeral service: scripture, songs, open/closed casket, pall bearers
- Flowers and/or 'Gifts in Memory of ____' to a specific charity or charities
- Will: keepsake assignments (to save many family squabbles)

Stewardly Tip: Shop around for Casket and Funeral Services. Be a good steward and at the same time save your loved ones a lot of grief. Make arrangements now. Join a "Memorial Society" that respects your desires. List your expectations/desires and have copies in a place known by your spouse/trustee(s). You don't necessarily have to buy your casket from the funeral home that is providing the services. Embalming may not be necessary, depending on timing/amount of travel. Be aware of what's required and what isn't. If you're internet savvy, visit 'www.canadianfunerals.com' for more information.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Asset Mapping for your Church

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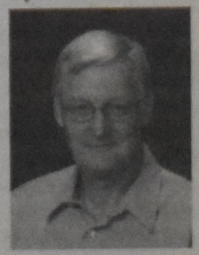


Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca

Church

The globalization of the dalit problem

Joseph D'souza

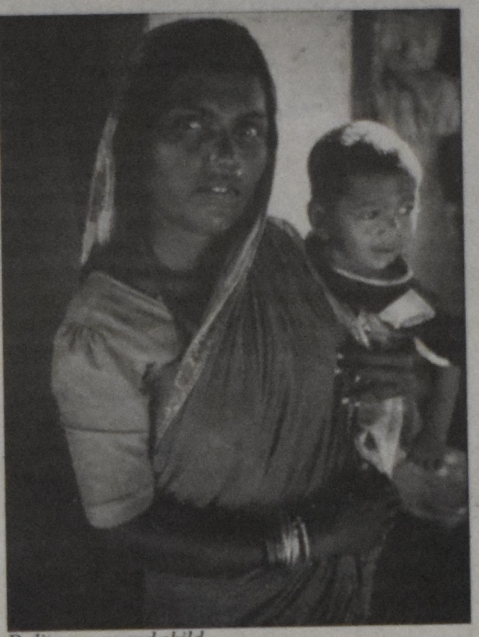
INDIA (ANS) – The cruel caste system has been a huge, neverending problem for us as Indians. Our inability to eradicate caste completely even after the rise of prophets like Mahatma Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar reveals our own blindness to one of the most dehumanizing systems the world has ever known. There is no point in saying that the Indian Constitution has abolished untouchability because we all know that the law has not taken care of the root system that gave rise to the practice of untouchability.

There is no point in saying that we have reservations for the Dalits, because if there were no reservation system, we would have effectively consigned all Dalits to their inhuman existence. We would not then have the few Dalit-Bahujan leaders who have risen to speak out on behalf of their people. To our utter shame, no significant campaign or movement has risen up after India's independence among the upper caste leadership in the nation, nor overseas, to end the caste system in Indian society.

If we are honest, we must admit that caste prejudice runs very deep in the Indian psyche.

So today, when Dalits agitate for some kind of quota system in the private sector, India's upper-caste-dominated industrialists shut the door in their faces! Dalit-Bahujan leaders are forced to appeal to the overseas multinational companies to voluntarily provide for affirmative action just as they have provided such benefits for African-Americans and other minorities in their own nations.

In order to make their case, the Dalit-Bahujan leaders have no option but to describe their lives as they know it in modern India. Let us be clear about this one thing: Caste is alive and well on planet India. Let us have the honesty and courage to deal with this problem and avoid the spin of the last several decades which says there is no caste system, nor the ensuing discrimination that has resulted in our cities, villages and towns.



Dalit woman and child

India politics failed

Politics has not delivered on the issues of Dalit discrimination or the abolishment of caste, Dr. Ambedkar's main dream and desire. What is required is the development of a national and global social conscience on the issue of caste discrimination and its atrocities. This new social conscience must be both national and global because the caste problem is not only limited to India. It is present in all South Asian nations and in other parts of the world where Indians congregate. The case of the foreign-based Indian woman who had her daughter and son-in-law murdered because of their inter-caste marriage is well known.

The rise of the extremist Hindutva movement also has meant the rise of the caste-based structure in society. How can we ignore the blatant distribution of the Manusmriti by the Sangh Parivar elements in Western India when their government was in power? The Sangh Parivar has not been shy of spreading this divisive and soul-destroying ideology even in the West and especially in America.

When after the lynching of the five Dalits in Jhajjar, Haryana, the Vice President of the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad – the world Hindu federation) can say that the life of the cow is more precious than the life of the Dalit we are brought face to face with colossal social blindness.

This social blindness can be cured only when there is the realization that all men and women are created equal and have equal intrinsic value and worth. True change can come only when everyone knows and agrees that Dalits and upper caste alike are equally created in God's likeness and there is no such thing as a God-given hierarchy of human beings.

There is now a growing national and global alliance of people – irrespective of caste, creed and religion – who believe that both the caste system and its consequences – the practice of untouchability and discrimination – must be abolished. It is this alliance which must educate, inform, campaign and be engaged in activism resulting in the growth and development of the social conscience which will revolt against any caste-based discrimination or prejudice. It is this conscience that will eventually abolish the caste system and that will realize India's greatness and true potential – the potential of its huge and utterly deprived masses.

Nevertheless, this is going to be a long, difficult struggle and campaign. Those who have profited economically and politically from the caste system will not yield easily. As we have noticed recently in the Gohana episode where 50 Dalit houses were burned, these forces will attack any assertion of Dalit rights.

The vast majority of our own people do not know the meaning of "India Shining" – a slogan of the upper-caste-dominated Indian elite. India does not shine for the masses – not simply because they are poor, but because of the social system that denies them equal opportunities, empowerment, capital and freedom. Globalization has resulted in "India Shining" for the privileged minority, but now let globalization also result in "India Shining" for the majority Dalits and other oppressed castes/tribes.

Dr. Joseph D'souza is president of the All India Christian Council, which is the largest interde-nominational alliance of Indian Christians that deals with national issues and concerns such as the persecution and oppression of Christians and other minorities, human rights issues and representing Christians in the media and political circles. He is one of the foremost voices in the human rights scene.

South Korea church body triggers North Korea human rights' debate

Kwon Hyeok-Ryul

Seoul (ENI) – The Christian Council of Korea (CCK) has triggered a debate in South Korea after pressuring the Seoul government over what it deems a silence about human rights in the communist North of the divided country.

After the US congress passed a North Korean human rights law in September, the CCK, seen by some as more conservative than the National Council of Churches in Korea, began to pressure the South Korean government for its silence on human rights in the North.

After the human rights commission of the CCK together with Freedom House, a US think tank, launched an international forum on human rights in North Korea, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) organized a seminar on the same topic.

But at the NCCK seminar, the Rev Kang-Bin Yim criticized the CCK, saying, "Groups that make a big issue out of North Korea's human rights do not really care about North Koreans. Their only interest is the collapse of the regime. We shouldn't be pulled into America's ultra-conservative plan to destroy the North Korea regime which might lead to another Korean War."

But the chairperson of the human rights commission of the CCK, the Rev. Kyung-Sek Seo rebutted the view of NCCK saying: "Even though the NCCK emphasises peace in the Korean peninsula, there is no real peace in Korea without human rights."

In a January 10 editorial the English-language daily newspaper, *The Korea Herald*, noted: "During Korea's authoritarian period, 'Hangichong' or the Christian Council of Korea remained largely disengaged from politics in contrast to the Korean National Council of Churches which was more critical of the government. With the advent of the current administration, however, Hangichong became politically active, raising its voice on sensitive social issues such as the repeal of the National Security Law and the changing pattern of Korea's alliance with the United States."

Church workers lament haphazard funding for tsunami relief

Anto Akkara

Chennai, India (ENI) – A year after the tsunami, church leaders heading up relief work along India's east coast have expressed concern about lack of coordination and haphazard funding.

"We could have done much better work but for lack of coordination," said the Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI), summing up the experience of its 11 member churches involved in tsunami relief work.

Martin told Ecumenical News International that although the church agencies had taken great care of those affected in their areas of responsibility, "lack of coordination was visible in many areas".

"There was an overwhelming response from donors and others, but due to the indiscriminate use of funds the (tsunami) victims have not had the kind of relief they could have had," lamented Sheila Jones, chief southern zone officer of the Churches Auxiliary for Social Action organization which represents 24 Orthodox and Protestant churches.

Jones felt that the huge influx of money had created competition amongst the NGOs to the detriment of the relief program, but she did highlight the government's housing construction program as a lone example of good coordination.

Both Jones and Martin raised the distribution of costly glass fibre boats in the region as an illustration of ill thought-out assistance. Jones described how some fishermen had been given two boats each, but that they were so big, each boat could have been shared between the four people required to sail them. Even worse, Martin said it was "a pity" that months after their distribution, nobody had bothered to provide the fishermen with nets or engines so they could use the boats.

"We have got these beautiful boats, but what can we do with them?" Asked Raman Sreenivasan, head of the fishing hamlet of Kodiyakarai situated 390 kilometres south of Chennai, the capital of southern Tamil Nadu state.

"We shall have to find other work if the situation remains like this," Sreenivasan told ENI as he removed the coconut palm leaves he is using to protect the eight-metre long boats.

Christians fear for safety ahead of Gujerat Hindu convention

Anto Akkara

New Delhi (ENI) – Churches from different denominations have appealed to Indian authorities to ensure the safety and religious freedom of Christians in the rural area known as the "tribal region" of Gujarat state.

"Plans are afoot for a massive (reconversion) programme aimed at the Christian population," cautioned the Church of North India in a statement on January 23 referring to a Hindu convention of half a million people being planned in the Dangs district of Gujarat.

In the run up to the February 11-13 Hindu convention, threats have come in the form of flyers espousing that "the momentum generated by the Kumbh [religious meeting] is expected to trigger the return of thousands of Christian converts back to the Hindu fold".

Following a similar Hindu convention in the same area at the end of 1998, more than 30 churches were torched and Christians attacked in the tribal region of Dangs.

Asserting "it is the constitutional right of an individual to choose religion of one's choice," the Church of North India urged the government to ensure the safety of 8,000 Christians in Dangs who live "under fear" as the Hindu convention draws near.

The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) that groups 29 Orthodox and Protestant churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the Roman Catholic Church and several Christian action groups had already made similar appeals to the federal and other authorities.

"The Christians there (in Dangs) are terrified," Bishop D K Sahu, NCCI general secretary, told ENIl on January 24 from his office in Nagpur in central India.

The Rev. Cedric Prakash, a Jesuit and secretary of the Social Communications Commission of the Catholic Bishops Council of western India, said from Ahmedabad in Gujarat: "Christians cannot expect much help from the state machinery."

Since early 1990, Gujarat has been ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which has been accused of conniving in attacks on the minority Muslims and Christians.

The Gujarat state government headed by its BJP leader Narendra Modi has been accused of condoning and later even protecting the accused in the massacre of more than 1000 Muslims in 2002 following the torching of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims.

Christian is parliamentary candidate for Islamic group Hamas

Michele Green

Jerusalem (ENI) – Hosam al-Taweel seems an unlikely candidate to run in the Palestinian parliamentary elections on behalf of the militant Islamic group Hamas. Al-Taweel, 40, is a Greek-Orthodox Christian living in the Gaza Strip who has volunteered at the local YMCA for more than three decades.

But he decided to join Hamas – a group that seeks to destroy Israel and replace it with an Islamic state based on strict Sharia law – because he believes a Hamas government is in the best interests of the Palestinian people.

"We are all – Christians and Muslims – united for a free Palestine. Our ancestors fought with the Muslim leader, Salah al-Din, against the crusaders," he told the Arabic-language al-Jazeera satellite television channel during an interview. "We also share a common suffering under Israeli occupation and each of us has reciprocal respect towards our religious beliefs."

Hamas is expected to strongly challenge President Mahmoud Abbas' mainstream Fatah movement in the January 25 parliamentary elections. Hamas' Change and Reform party stands for ending rampant corruption in the Palestinian Authority.

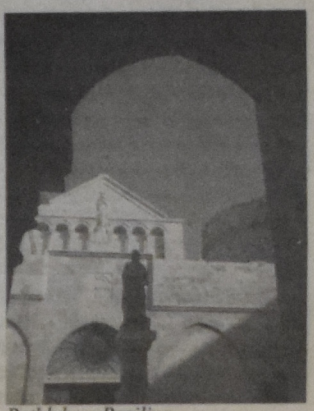
But the prospect it could win the election or do well enough to influence the Palestinian Authority has some Western countries worried, as Hamas is regarded as a terrorist group that has spearheaded a wave of suicide bombings against Israel.

This does not concern al-Taweel, who has said he opposes the 1993 Oslo peace accords with Israel and calls for Palestinians to continue to resist Israeli occupation.

"My program isn't specifically for Christians only, but designed for all Palestinians," he said. "We are fighting for the right of return of displaced Palestinian refugees and fighting corruption in Palestinian governance."

There are about 10,000 Palestinian Christians living in the Gaza Strip and, as in the West Bank, their numbers have dwindled over the past century. Christianity in Gaza dates to shortly after the death of Jesus. The first Christian martyr in Gaza was Bishop Sylvanus, who was killed in AD 284.

Cooperation between Christians and Hamas is not new. In the West Bank city of Bethlehem, the Christian mayor took power due to a coalition he formed with the Hamas-dominated city council.



Bethlehem Basilica

Encyclical on love seen as Pope's 'compassionate' conservatism

Stephen Brown

Rome (ENI) – Pope Benedict XVI has won plaudits from what some consider an unlikely quarter for attempting in his encyclical to relate the spiritual and erotic aspects on love, delivering what one commentator labelled a "compassionate conservatism".

True the dissenting Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kueng was critical of what he said was Benedict's failure in the encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est" (Latin for "God is Love"), to tackle the issues of justice within the Roman Catholic Church such as the welcoming of divorced and remarried people in the church.

But in comments reported by the Agence France-Presse news provider, Kueng praised Benedict's attempt in the document to link "Agape" [Christian love] and "Eros" [erotic love].

"Pope Ratzinger offers in an objective way a solid theological presentation between Eros and Agape, love and charity, and he is careful to avoid creating false oppositions. It's a positive sign that I welcome," said Kueng, whose licence to teach Catholic theology was revoked by the Vatican in 1979 after he was critical of concepts such as papal infallibility and the virgin birth.

In the first part of the 72-page encyclical of January 25 Benedict takes issue with the idea the Church completely rejects the idea of eros, or erotic love, in favor of what could be seen as a higher, spiritual love. "Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love - eros - able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur," writes Benedict.

And, he notes later, "Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life."

Fundamentally, says Benedict, "'love' is a single reality, but with different dimensions – yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love." Neither does the Bible reject erotic love, Benedict underlines, noting that the Old Testament prophets, for example, use "boldly erotic images" to describe God's passion for his people.

Still, Benedict's insistence of the need to hold together the erotic and spiritual aspects of love means he is also critical of what he describes as Eros reduced to "pure 'sex'", where "it becomes a 'thing' to be bought and sold". "Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere," he writes.

Benedict adds, "True, eros tends to rise "in ecstasy" towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing."

As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Benedict had a reputation for being a stern authoritarian before his papacy.

Yet, some commentators have seen in the new encyclical an attempt to portray a softer, gentler papacy than critics might have predicted. For John Allen, the veteran Vatican watcher who writes for the US-based National Catholic Reporter, the Pope wants to show that ultimately, the church's "yes" is to love. "The encyclical," wrote Allen after seeing a draft of the encyclical in advance of its delivery, "is Pope Benedict's version of 'compassionate conservatism'."

Reformed Church reverses decision to open diaconate to women

Johannesburg – Women were shut out of most leadership positions in one of South Africa's most orthodox Afrikaans churches.

After nearly two weeks of men-only debate by almost 300 church members at a synod in Potchefstroom, the decision was made to retrench.

The Gereformeerde Kerk (Reformed Church), which has 414 congregations and about 250,000 members countrywide, opened the door to women in 2003 allowing them to serve as church deacons.

But this year it was shut again, with the synod deciding that only already-ordained women deacons could remain. Women will not be able to become elders or ministers in the church.

A synodical report argued that, based on the Bible, the man was the head of the household:

"A woman may not be in an authoritative, instructive or ruling position over a man. A woman's right to speak is limited."

The reversal of direction came when some of the 47 churches that objected to women holding church office threatened to break away. Delegates to synod pointed out that allowing female deacons was "destroying the unity of the church".

Some ministers said women should be allowed to occupy any position in church.

"The synod decision is a big setback for women and for all the congregations that looked forward to women playing a bigger role. It's a huge disappointment," said Braam Kruger of Benoni.

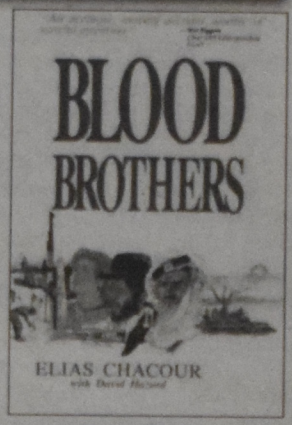
Ministering

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

PEACEMAKERS

...an inspiration to us all

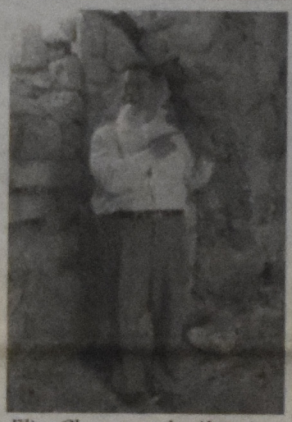
Peace is the result of a certain quality of human relations. Elias Chacour



I cannot help but admire Elias Chacour. He is the author of "Blood Brothers" a memoir of his experience – as a 12-year-old Arab Christian of Galilee – of the founding of the State of Israel and the destruction of his village. He also wrote *We Belong to the Land: the story of a Palestinian Israeli who lives for peace and reconciliation.* He has won numerous peace awards. I often wonder how he keeps focused in face of the escalating violence in the Mid East.

Chacour is a Catholic Palestinian priest who grew up in the village of Biram in Galilee. He remembers when the first Jewish soldiers came to his little village after WW II to look over the land. His father at that time bought some lamb and prepared a feast for the machine gun-toting Israeli soldiers. Eventually his parents' beautiful fig orchard was seized by the Israelis and sold to an expatriate investor. His father agreed to tend for wages the orchard, which was rightly his.

For Chacour, the Sermon on the Mount was a key text in his upbringing. His father did not believe in spending time hating others and advised his family to pray for those who made life hard for them. His parents firmly believed God wanted them to bring peace to the Jews. And so, Chacour learned to see the Arab-Jewish problem through the teachings of Jesus. He fully believes we are able to love with our minds and to reflect and to think with our hearts. He has chosen to extend an open hand to Jewish and Muslim people rather than a threatening fist.



Elias Chacour at the Abunain Biram Ruins

During the last two decades, Chacour has founded the Mar Elias Educational Institute in Ibillin, Galilee. The interfaith school, with classes from kindergarten through college, enrols more than 5,000 students including Christians, Muslims, Druze and Jews, all of whom study together. Some time ago, a high-ranking official from the office of Ariel Sharon visited Mar Elias and said to Chacour, "We have been going in the wrong direction and (we know) your small Christian community has an important mediation role – we know you speak of love and tolerance and we need Christians to be a bridge between Jewish and Muslims worlds."

This is an encouragement to all of us as we also try to walk in a way that breaks down cultural barriers.

In the political world, visionaries of peace are sometimes seen as "naïve" and not fully grasping the reality of our complex world. Yet, it is obvious from the work of Elias Chacour that this is not the case. If anything he *lives* Gandhi's well-known proverb: *BE the change you wish to see in the world....* What strikes me, however, is how Chacour's work in promoting peace in the Mid East is very similar to what Spielberg is trying to address in his latest film "Munich." Both individuals are telling the world that true peace can only come through mutual understanding and respect.

All of the foregoing, however, begs the question of whether peacemaking makes any difference to terrorists or to Iran's repulsive regime. And the answer is clear...it *could* make a difference, but it doesn't because terrorists and ego driven leaders are not interested in doing what is best for all concerned. They choose to act according to their own ego demands.

This is not news to us in the 21st century. We all remember the atrocities committed by Hitler and Stalin. At the same time, no one wants a repeat of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And so we have come to a time in history in which we cannot afford a dangerous regime to have access to weaponry that can destroy the world. The U.N. has a huge responsibility in this regard. And while I realize all of this is very complex, I feel grateful to all visionary peacemakers who daily practice what so many of us preach. Their work is a beacon of hope in our diverse and troubled world. May we not only learn from them but also support their cause.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

Harvesttime

Wilma Jonkheer

It was summertime. The trees were laden with ripening fruit. Soon it would be harvest time. High above the streets lined with colorful borders lowered the hospital as an ever-ready community of healing.

I was on the Chaplaincy Team and visited with the children and their parents on the Paediatric Care Unit. Some years ago, we had a vision of supplying each of the children with a Bible Story Book and those over twelve with a Youth Bible. Permission was granted providing we would not leave a Bible with any of the children without a parent, relative, or guardian's consent.

My initial excitement had never worn off, and now more than ten years later, I still marveled how in our fast changing society this ministry of Bible distribution had remained untouched.

Sixty percent of the children on the unit have little or no church affiliation, and I had expected some opposition, but the opposite proved to be true. Ninety-nine percent of all parents gratefully accept this gift from the Chaplaincy and many Bibles have gone out since that time.

I always rejoice when I see a parent already reading a Bible story to his or her child while I am still on the unit. Many of them will say, "I used to have something like this when I was young, but I got away from it as I got older."

I never cease to hurt when I'm in a room with two children, one has a parent and the other doesn't. And I have often found a way to get a Bible to the latter child as well.

Like the little girl who followed me around in bare feet asking if she, too, could have a Bible Story Book. I ended up calling her mother at work.

The stained glass windows in the Chapel illuminates familiar gospel stories and it seems a Presence was waiting for me there. "Lo, I am with you always," a wall hanging reads.

In the room I visited next were two boys about eight years old. One was surrounded by family. The other was alone. While the one had his wall covered with get-well cards, the other sat quietly coloring a picture by an empty window sill.

His name was Johnny, and he had raven black hair and big brown eyes. His small white face will be forever engraved on my mind. I felt I was in the presence of someone who had lived longer than I had. What I saw was the face of a little old man. Nothing would ever shock it anymore; he had seen it all!

He was polite, but the wall of caution he had built around himself remained, and there was no smile on his face. I was afraid to ask when or whether his parents were coming to see him. When I left the room, I ached for him.

"Why this contrast, Lord?" I asked. Why is the one basking in the sunshine and the other living in the twilight? Why couldn't I give a Bible to the one I wanted to give it to the most?

I continued my visits. Several of the children were in traction with broken bones, and as always I admired the patience of these children and their parents, but my mind was on Johnny.

When I finished my visiting, I walked to the elevator and waited for it to go down. I felt a nudging: "Give that boy another chance."

I turned around and walked back. When I entered the room, I saw a man dressed in black leaning against the door frame – a tall menacing shadow against the brightly colored walls of the unit. He had long black hair and his arms were covered with tattoos.

I introduced myself and he began to talk. I don't know how long I stood there looking up at him and listening to him. There was no light in his face and no hope in his voice. I sensed that his soul was as dark as his clothes.

He had done it all and had lost his wife and daughter. He had become angry and his son had become the victim. He had believed in God at one time but not any longer.

When I told him that I had visited with his son, he showed no interest. And when I asked his permission to give Johnny a Bible Story Book, he remained silent ... then finally said, "I don't want to influence him either way. Let the boy make up his own mind."

As I walked to the Chapel to get the Bible, I prayed, "Lord, this is not a battle between the boy's father and me; this is a battle between You and Satan!"

When I came back, the father had moved inside the room, watching every move I made.

I went to his son and said, "Johnny, I've come back and I've got something for you. Would you like to have this Bible Story Book?"

I held my breath as the boy reached for the Bible and held it in his hands. Then he smiled and said, "Yes!"

Tears welled up in my eyes ... and as I walked past the father, he nodded his head in silent approval.

Viewpoints

Life in the signal box

Beware the confident futurist

Clint Sherwood

Countless thousands of gallons of ink have been splashed around Christian publishing houses in the past thirty years or so, producing detailed expositions of the future. The flames of this phenomenon were fanned into an inferno by the bestselling *Left Behind* series, which follows the adventures of people caught up in the world of the future, sometime after the return of Christ.

Hard on the heels of the unprecedented horrors of World War II, and all that went on in the years preceding it, this obsession with the fulfilment of Bible prophecy in our lifetime should come as no surprise. Particularly is this the case when one considers the most popular interpretation of Bible prophecy, embodied in the novels noted above. This uniquely North American view includes a miraculous mass exodus of all believers before anything really bad (i.e., Apocalyptic) happens.

To exit an increasingly hostile world in a such a Spielberg-esque flash of glory –"planes fall inexplicably from the skies; cars careen off the highway!" – certainly appeals to the Hollywood that now seems permanently written into our genetic code. (Many other biblically orthodox groups confidently arrive at very different and much less dramatic conclusions about the future. They do this, curiously enough, while citing many of the same verses used by the more spectacular schools of thought in this area.)

It would be unfortunate, and unintended, if what I've written to this point leads you to conclude that I take one position or another on the matter. The problem, I think, is not the biblical correctness of any particular view, nor necessarily the rapacious profiteering by one group on the emotional and spiritual poverty among Christians today. Instead, the problem is the often divisive certainty with which the proponents of the various views hold their positions.

Scene from Left Behind series

I am reminded of J.I. Packer's illustration in *Knowing God* of being in the signal box in a train yard. High above the tracks and trains, the man in the signal box sees all; he understands why this train must go on this track and that one on that track. Those on the ground see only apparently mindless and undirected activity. Devotees of any particular view of end-time events seem to have determined that they alone are in the signal box.

Packer doesn't speak specifically of the study of end-times, but his observations are worth considering in this context. He says that we Christians like to picture ourselves in the signal box, privy to inside information about God and his intentions in the world. We do so, Packer says, "for the honor of God.... And also, though we do not say this, for the sake of our own reputation as spiritual Christians...."

This supposed knowledge is a "... comforting pretense [that] becomes part of us: we feel sure that God has enabled us to understand all his ways with us and our circle thus far, and we take it for granted that we shall be able to see at once the reason for anything that may happen ... in the future."

Packer suggests we travel a perilous path when our thoughts lead in this direction.

God in his grace has unquestionably provided us with snapshots and vignettes of the future. Why has he done this? I would suggest that he has done this (to borrow another allusion from Packer) so that we will concern ourselves only with the next road sign. And as Jesus' own disciples found out to their chagrin, sometimes even these road signs are seen clearly only in the rear view mirror.

At this point incautious Christians may fall into an unfortunate trap. Rather than simply regarding biblical prophecy for what it is – snapshots and vignettes of the future provided by a gracious God for their encouragement, they reach for the scissors and tape. Splicing together whatever passages fit their particular view, they confidently present to an eager audience a grainy, herky-jerky film that purports to fill in every blank.

Tied as they often are to their proponents' seats of authority, such "films" all too easily end up – implicitly or explicitly – in the Statement of Faith: shabby, illegitimate, and distracting siblings of the glorious truths of the Gospel of Grace.

Using Ecclesiastes as his text, Packer counsels that true biblical wisdom leads us in a decidedly different direction. Godly wisdom focuses our attention not on the dizzying kaleidoscope of as-yet-unfulfilled prophecy, but instead on our daily responsibilities to God and to a lost and dying world. Jesus offered a pithy summary of Ecclesiastes when he said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Mt. 6: 32, 33)

In these particularly perilous and spiritually needy times, it seems we do well to heed our Lord's advice. And the next time we are tempted to propagate as dogma what our darkened minds have concluded about the future, we may want to stop and humbly consider the many times in the past we've been wrong about far more obvious spiritual propositions.

TV priest faces insuperable problem: cancellation

Chris Herlinger

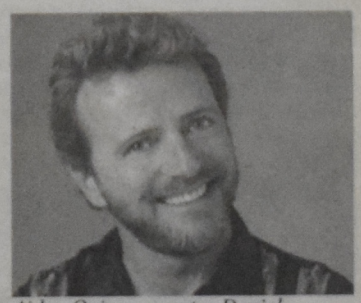
New York (ENI) – Conservative critics are claiming victory over the closing of a new prime-time US television series that depicted the life of an Episcopal (Anglican) priest, with a host of family problems who held long conversations with a seemingly hip Jesus.

"The Book of Daniel" show, which debuted on January 6 but only aired four of its eight scheduled episodes, provoked howls of protest from groups such as the American Family Association (AFA) which orchestrated a campaign to cancel the series. The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) received 678,000 angry e-mails from family association supporters, prompting advertisers to pull out and a number of NBC affiliates to refuse to run the show.

Ed Vitagliano, an official with the AFA, said the series mocked Christianity and he criticized the Daniel character. "I don't know anybody this dysfunctional in my over 20 years in the ministry," he said in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. Vitagliano noted that the series was "not a realistic portrayal of a minister's life. This was so far beyond the pale, it was almost a comic strip version."

The series featured actor Aidan Quinn as the Rev. Daniel Webster, who sought advice from Jesus on his sometimes troubled marriage and his rocky relationship with his three children – one gay, one sexually promiscuous and one dealing with drugs.

Addiction was a serious problem in the Webster household with the reverend himself apparently dependent on pain-killers, while his wife "really likes her martinis," as one Texas television critic wrote.



Aidan Quinn as pastor Daniel

Also on the series, Rev. Webster locked horns with the first female bishop in his diocese, Beatrice Congreve, who was played by Academy Award-winning actress Ellen Burstyn.

Facing criticism after the first broadcasts, series' creator Jack Kenny defended the show explaining, "Most everyone seems to understand that this is not any kind of attack or mocking of Christianity, but rather simply a fictional story in which the characters happen to be Christians."

As controversy grew Kenny tried to rally support, pleading with fans to lobby the network and calling the "bullies" who sought to kill his show "un-Christian and un-American." But the series never established a substantial audience base.

"Whatever the outcome, I feel that I accomplished what I set out to do," wrote Kenny in a blog on NBC's home page. "A solid family drama, with lots of humor that honestly explored the lives of the Webster family. I was proud of our product."

Biblical politics

"Politics beyond the usual"

A post-election reflection on Mark 10:32-52

Brian J. Walsh

It didn't seem like such a terrible request at the time.

I can understand why the others got mad. And maybe they were right. Maybe John and I were out of line. But that's not the way it felt to us at the time.

You see, we were all caught up in the excitement of the moment. We had hoped before, but this time … this time … it was different.

The vision caught on, the tide had turned, the crowds were following us, and we could feel – heck, we could taste – the victory. I'd seen similar campaigns fall apart before – sometimes out of internal dissension, more often out of the sheer power of the ruling party. But this time it was different. This time we knew that our leader would take us to victory, our leader would attain power, and his vision would quench the thirst for change that we all had. The old corrupt government would be overthrown and a new day would dawn.

That was the vision. That was the excitement. No wonder we followed him in amazement. And no wonder the crowds were afraid. Real change, real shifts in political power, are seldom pretty, and even less seldom peaceful. Change is a scary thing.

But if there is going to be change, then you have to plan for it carefully. You need to start thinking about new structures, new leadership, new initiatives. I mean it's one thing to have a vision, it's another thing altogether to enact that vision from the corridors of power.

So John and I were engaging in real politics. There were some important posts that needed to be filled in the new cabinet and we thought – perhaps arrogantly – that we had the track record with the party, the relationship with the leader, and the appropriate skills to be in the inner circle. No one could question that John was one of the most intelligent and reflective of our group – kind of the resident philosopher who dealt with the big picture issues. Indispensable in this kind of political movement. And I have always been known as a man of action. Let John do the complicated thinking, and I'll enact a plan.

It didn't seem like such a terrible idea at the time. So we mustered up our courage and asked Jesus if he would do for us whatever we asked. I mean, we'd seen him grant the requests of lepers and sick people and all kinds of destitute folk, was it that out of line to think that he might grant a well-intentioned request from a couple of his closest colleagues?

And he said, "What do you want me to do for you?"

So we asked. Could one of us be on his right hand side and the other on his left in his glory? Could we occupy these two closest and most important positions in the new government that he was about to establish?

We could see the disappointment in his face. "You don't have a clue about what you are asking," he said. "Can you drink the cup that I must drink, and be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Baptism? Sure, we're ready to get wet in the Jordan. And the cup, well, we didn't really know what he was getting at, but we figured, why not? What's the problem?

"Well, fine," he replied. "You will be baptized with my baptism and my cup you will drink, but the matter of who will be on my right and my left in my glory is not for me to grant. It is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Before we had time to figure out what exactly all of this meant, the other ten got wind of the conversation and all hell broke loose. The other guys were very angry at John and I, so Jesus called a caucus meeting.

"What kind of a kingdom do you think I'm bringing?" He asked. "Haven't you been listening? Haven't I told you three times along the way that when we get to Jerusalem I will be killed? Didn't I just say that I would first be handed over to the Jewish authorities who will condemn me to death, and then they will pass me over

Political action of a different sort . . . *see article on page 24*

Rooftop experience for HDCH students

Biblical politics

to the Gentile authorities for a second trial and they will mock me, spit upon me, flog me and kill me?

"Didn't you hear any of that? And didn't you hear that after all of this I will then rise from the dead? Don't you get it?

"The Gentiles (and their Jewish yes-men) rule as tyrants, addicted to power, to status, to wealth, to control. That is the kind of rule that takes me to my death. But that is not the game we are playing. That is politics as usual, but I bring a politics beyond the usual. I bring a politics, a kingdom, a civil society and a community of justice in which service – indeed, sacrificial service – is the name of the game. If you want to be great in this kingdom, then you must take the stance of a servant. If you want to be esteemed in this kingdom, then you must become a slave of all."

We continued down the road in silence. Not the silence of internal dissension, but the silence of embarrassed confusion. What kind of a kingdom was this? It wasn't just John and I who had got it so terribly wrong. We all had. And we just couldn't see what all this would mean.

As we got close to Jerusalem, we passed through Jericho. And on the other side of town, our silence was shattered by the voice of a blind man shouting out at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The man's name was Bartimeaus and the people around him told him to be quiet. Not only was he disturbing everyone with his shouting out, what he was actually saying could have brought the attention of the authorities. He was identifying Jesus with the royal line of David – always a dangerous thing to do.

But he just kept on shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped in his tracks and told the people around to call the man over to him. I saw him jump up, leave his cloak behind – the only possession he likely had – and make his way to Jesus.

Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

John and I looked at each other. This was the very same thing Jesus had asked of us. "What do you want me to do for you?"

But unlike my brother and I, this man, this beggar son of Timeaus, said, "My rabbi, let me see again."

"Let me see."

Not political power, not a place of prestige, just vision. Real vision.

Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has made you well."

And then he immediately regained his sight. But he didn't go. He didn't get his sight back, say thank you and go back to his home and his family. No, he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way. He followed Jesus, and the rest of us, to Jerusalem and the events that were about to unfold.

Bartimeaus wanted to see. John and I assumed that we could see very well, and that we had even caught sight of Jesus' vision of the kingdom. We presumed to see the shape of his change of government and to even discern a place for ourselves in that new government – one on the right, one on the left.

But we were even more blind than Bartimeaus, and were too blind to even notice.

And so it wasn't until that terrible Friday morning in Jerusalem a week later that I finally got my sight. It wasn't until they put him on that cross, with an inscription above his head that read, "The King of the Jews" before my blindness was healed – through my tears.

"And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left." (15.27) There he was – enthroned on a cross. There he was in his "glory." And there were the two for whom it was granted that they be on his left and on his right.

This was not politics as usual. This was politics beyond the usual.

This was not a politics of aggressive power, but a politics of sacrificial love.

This was not the blindness of the same old politics only in a different package. No, this was a vision enacted in front of us, that opened our eyes to a radically new vision of life.

And so, my friends, Jesus still asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Good question. What do you want him to do for you?

Brian Walsh serves as a Christian Reformed campus minister to the University of Toronto.

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

Winter memories

What a strange winter this has been so far. Last weekend we cancelled a family ski trip due to the rain. For us, rain is something usually reserved for the campgrounds, not the ski hills. While waiting for the next snowstorm I've been reminiscing about winters long past.

The winter when I was six years old was bitterly cold. I remember one time when my mother was preparing for a rare early shift the next day. She sternly reminded my fourteen-year-old brother that he would be responsible for waking me up on time, getting my breakfast and making sure that I was properly bundled up for the frigid walk to school.

Jimmy never was an early riser (still isn't). He roused me abruptly the next morning, telling me to hurry because it was already 8:55. I dressed as quickly as I could and barreled downstairs, where he handed me a banana for breakfast. I ate it while pulling on my coat, boots and mittens. Big brother squashed a hat onto my head and then tied a scarf around my face so tightly that it flattened my nose and I had to breathe through my mouth. Out the door we went – hand in hand, as I tried my level best to keep up with his lengthy strides.

Suddenly the tension overwhelmed me. I began to cry. Jimmy stopped in his tracks and knelt down, wiping the tears from what little showed of my cheeks with his big gloved hand.

"Okay, don't worry. I'll explain to your teacher what happened. It'll be fine. But you've got to stop crying."

I tried. I really did. But big fat teardrops just kept squeezing out.

"Look," he said, "It's 99 below. If you cry when it's this cold your eyeballs will freeze solid and they'll drop right out of your head."

I gasped at the thought of seeing my eyeballs rolling down the sidewalk like two glass marbles. Or would I see my sightless body groping blindly for the wayward eyeballs? Either prospect was terrifying.

I probably wouldn't have believed my brother's gruesome warning, but the previous week I had doubted his advice that a person could get their tongue stuck to a frozen metal pipe. Having learned the hard way that he was telling the truth then, I thought it best to be safe now. The tears stopped. Even now, when it gets really cold I make sure I have my emotions in check before I go outside.

And then there was the winter of Grade three. I usually walked home from school with two other girls my age. Almost every day the neighborhood boys ambushed us and snatched the hats right off our heads. Most often they would toss them into the street as they ran away laughing.

Tired of seeing her only daughter with tread marks on her toque, my mother came home one day with what she thought was the perfect solution. It was a hideous woolen cap – brilliant red, covered in sequins and topped with a pom-pom the size of a softball. Even worse than the sequins were the dorky knitted straps that tied up under your chin (preventing nasty boys from pulling the thing off your head).

I will never forget the smirks on my companions' faces the morning I showed up wearing "Scarlet O'Hara." Right then and there I made plans to get rid of the glittering red beacon. On the way home from school that day I tarried behind my friends just a little. When we were on the bridge by the feedmill I dropped my new cap and "accidentally" kicked it into the water below.

My mother questioned me the next morning. "How could you have lost your new hat already?" she asked with a furrowed brow.

Her expression softened a little when I suggested that probably someone who was jealous had stolen it for themselves. I promised to keep an eye out for it on the playground.

And, yes, my conscience did bother me. For at least a week afterward I had dreams of that incredibly ugly hat floating down Twenty Mile Creek. But my crime remained unconfessed. Until now.

Aside from the suppressed trauma and residual guilt, I do have many happy winter memories. I guess it's really not such a bad season. After all, there's no grass to cut, no leaves to rake, no pool to clean. I'm not tempted to abandon my work and take off on my motorbike.

And how bad can a season be when you have time to sit around and remember the goofy things you did as a child?

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com

Ecclesiastes

Man cannot stand up to his Creator

> Whatever exists has already been named,
> and what man is has been known;
> no man can contend with one
> who is stronger than he.
>
> Ecclesiastes 6:10

A. A. van Ruler

Man may inflate his own importance and imagine himself center of the universe, but that does not alter the fact that he is and remains a human being. This fact is not only protection against all our grand illusions but also against genuine change. Humanity displays a thousand different faces, and he may do many things. He may become very powerful, but that does not alter the fact that he is human.

In the word for man – adam – the Preacher hears the echo of the word from which adam derives – clay, dirt. That is where we come from. We are not made up out of the same substance as God. We don't derive from eternity or from heaven. We come from the dust of the earth and that is what we are. This implies a certain powerlessness and insignificance. We participate in the frailty of the dust of the earth.

We've always known that, says the Preacher. What we are has long been known; our nature has been named – adam. Let's take a close look at what this means. The Preacher pauses at this observation with a smile. No matter how we may inflate ourselves and no matter the greatness of our achievements, we can't hide what we really are. Our name is a dead giveaway: we are man, formed from the dust of the earth.

This is a striking thought. The human race has journeyed through the earth without illusions, always knowing what it really is. There have always been those, of course, who forgot, and who think very highly of themselves. Some even delude themselves into thinking that they are gods. But these are scattered individuals or short periods.

History keeps producing periods of great optimism in which humans think they are capable of anything. But we are not now living in such a time. Perhaps the nineteenth century was that optimistic.

Generally speaking, however, the human race has always been aware that we are nothing more than human beings. Israel has always been very aware of the earthly, fragile content of the word for mankind. But other peoples were also aware of it.

The most characteristic thing about our humanity – our frailty and finitude – the Preacher describes in this way: man cannot contend with one who is stronger than he. By this he means God: it is God who is stronger than man.

That is a strange thing to say. We could make many other kinds of observations about God. We could, for example, say that he is very different from man, that he is holy or more just or more gracious.

But the Preacher has something else in mind. He wants to focus on the fact that God is stronger than man. The Creator is capable of much greater things than the creature. Our Creator can do anything he wishes, while the creature is able to do almost nothing, or at least very little. He cannot stand up against God.

This observation is very uncharacteristic; it almost puts him outside Israel's heritage. It is much more characteristic of the biblical way of thinking to give to man a very prominent position, even over toward God. Man is called to become Israel – a contender for and a contender with God; even a contender against God, like Jacob, who wrestled all night with an angel. It is to such nobility that man is called: to stand proudly before God. He is expected to show some backbone.

He is supposed to be a worthy contender with God. The Preacher is here in danger of betraying that Hebrew insight by saying, "Man is actually unable to do anything over against God, for God is much stronger than he is."

There is also a trace of this in the story of Jacob. The wrestling match between man and God lasts the entire night, as if God is having a hard time pinning him down. This is where man becomes Israel. He behaves with nobility. But in the end God only needs to touch man's hip and man is crippled, sentenced to limp for the rest of his life. This scene does also clearly hint that in it all God is nevertheless the stronger.

This is what the Preacher emphasizes very one-sidedly in our text. He does not quite abandon his Hebrew roots here. Part of man's nobility before God is this tenacity: he collides radically with the unshakeable reality of God to experimentally discover this truth – that God is after all stronger than he is and that he himself is merely human.

Surprisingly, in this connection the Preacher immediately moves from the issue of power to the issue of justice. On the one hand, he speaks of a God who is stronger than man, and on the other hand he concludes that man has no appeal beyond God. He cannot take God to court to level all sorts of charges against him there, and to receive a judgment about the justice of God's dealing with him.

Why can't we do that? We might answer, "Because God is much wiser than we are. If it came to a legal argument, God can easily refute our objections with a series of arguments that we would have to admit are beyond us, because they anticipate." We might also answer: "Because God is much more righteous than man. He takes everything into account, and this is why he acts as he does. So we can raise no objections, for in God there is no trace of injustice."

But when he argues that man cannot and may not take God to court, the Preacher does not appeal to God's wisdom and righteousness. He simply says that this is not proper for man to do because God is stronger than man.

This touches on a deep level of human experience and sounds a sonorous note. Here the ultimate questions of life are entirely resolved in terms of power. God takes matters into his own hands and simply does what he pleases in his all-powerful freedom. How can man resist? He can criticize. He can murmur. He can rebel. He can complain and lament. He can even curse the whole business. But what does that gain him? God goes his own sovereign way in this world. He is stronger than man.

This too is something we must absorb into our attitude toward life and this world. It is part of godly piety and it is a fruit of faith. We must respect the fact that God is stronger than we are.

True, we must be on our guard that this is not the only way we relate to God. We must not see this in terms of God simply overpowering us. Although he is stronger than us, he is also wise and just – and above all good. Even when we do not experience this and it is not immediately obvious, we must cling to God's goodness. Otherwise our pious respect for God's power devolves into a servile respect for a tyrant.

But God is not a tyrant. Not according to the Preacher. God is wise and just and good; he is not a tyrant.

For he had great possessions by Watts

Church revitalisation

Two books on one theme

Richard Oostra

Two books recently came across my desk that were remarkably refreshing and strikingly similar. Most books about the church usually focus on church growth. These books, however, made me excited about the church and about its revitalization.

The first book is by Willem J. Ouweneel, a pastor in the Netherlands, *Meer Geest in the Gemeenten* (More Life in the Church). Ouweneel comes from a very strict traditional background, but he broke with dead traditionalism and has become a voice for change first in his own circles and then throughout Holland, using Christian television to proclaim his message.

According to the author new life for the church first begins with you, so he raises many personal questions as to where you stand with God. Secondly, new life in the church is the work of the Holy Spirit, so he asks, "What is holding you back from becoming what God wants you to be?"

A book in the English language by a young pastoring couple Kirk and Rose Farnsworth entitled *All Churches Great and Small* also focuses on change.

At a time when we hear so much that is negative about the church, this couple, who has gone through many disappointments and struggles over the years, has a rousing positive message.

Kirk holds a PhD in counseling and psychology and Rosie a B.S. from Wheaton College. Kirk's first book was *Wounded Workers*, which describes pastors like himself who have been deeply disillusioned and hurt while in ministry.

Having been healed from this negative experience, the Farnsworth's focused on what they see as a more biblical approach towards church and ministry. Together they started a new church through neighborhood evangelism.

A church is not a mechanism to form us all into the same pattern. Nor is it an organization that works like a business. But it is an organism through which God wants to express and reveal himself.

The new book is a resource center of what many authors have said about the church and how to go about nurturing a healthy church.

It offers more than sixty ideas for improving the church's ministry, and is a tremendous aid to those who are concerned about the decline in today's church. Designed for group discussion, it shows how to move your church from "easy believism" into wholehearted discipleship.

This book is written from neither a "seeker friendly" nor a Reformed perspective; it is based upon the authors' own experience of building a small church on what they feel are New Testament principles.

The first question they raise is, "What is the DNA of your church?" To what area of service is God really directing and calling your church? A church is not a mechanism to form us all into the same pattern. Nor is it an organization that works like a business. But it is an organism through which God wants to express and reveal himself.

Because the authors raise sheep as a hobby, the chapter on shepherding provides many interesting examples. They describe caring for the sheep as the highest calling for the shepherd. Are the sheep growing spiritually? Reading their bibles? Striving to live by spiritual motives? Are they involved in a ministries they are uniquely gifted for? Are they people of prayer? A pastor who is as interested in his flock as in church growth, must raise such questions. A true shepherd must be interested in people and not just programs, money or performance.

In many church meetings, most people are like ships passing through the night. The authors describe different forms of gatherings for worship. Although they may be what we have become used to, they might not be what our Lord intended. When Jesus met with the people in his time, they were interactive kinds of gatherings. And Israel first met in a tent, later in a temple. The persecuted church met in dungeons, in fields or in homes.

A question we may have to ask ourselves is, "For what purpose do we gather?" If it is for spiritual growth, is sitting in a pew from Sunday to Sunday and never questioning anything the most effective form of learning? More questions follow. Is it proper to look at a pastor as a coach, or is he still a priest? What steps need to be taken to help a church in decline?

This is a revolutionary book that challenges many of our traditions. It emphasizes ministry involvement for all believers based upon spiritual qualifications and giftedness. It describes guidelines for effective prayer meetings, the kinds of prayer that should be discouraged, and the importance of fasting occasionally.

Drawing on the experience of beginning a church from scratch, the authors emphasize the need for having God-equipped and motivated people for evangelism. They especially stress relationship evangelism. Believers must be encouraged to start where they are – with family, friends and those they already know. Include them in your interests and hobbies. Develop a deepening relationship with them. Pray for them and help them in their needs. Be prepared to explain to them what it means to be a Christian so that you will be used by God to see them grow into saving faith instead of merely taking them to church to let the pastor be responsible.

The book discusses standards and qualifications for eldership. Spiritual guidance must be sought in choosing elders instead of merely going for a majority vote. Biblical leadership will bring not just growth but also the vision of birthing another church so that God's kingdom may grow and his will be done on earth.

This book is great for anyone to ponder who is concerned about his or her church. Not just "seeker friendly" I found it to be "bible friendly" – striving to grow a church that is alive, a candle upon a hill and a light that shines in darkness.

All Churches Great and Small: 60 Ideas for Improving Your Church's Ministry, Farnsworth, Kirk & Rose, Judson Press ISBN: 0817014780

Humor

Sonnieschoel pikkenik

Dirk Nieland

Maai, maai, wat kun je toch n latse fon hebben als je met n nais bonze piepel uitgaat. Onze sjurts had gisteren Sonnieschoel pikkenik, en omdat de peent bisnis toch wat slek is, zeg ik toe mijn wijf: "Nou, ma, wij gaan toedee eens afleggen en naar de Fiftevven woeds om te zien wat daar goon aan is."

Wel, mijn wijf is alletaim reddie voor n goed taim en zoo pekten wij 'n besket met senwisjes en bons met hem en sjies en benennes en piekels en zoo, en wat koffie in 'n froetken en toen zijn we in ons deliwer trukje er heen gereden.

Wij konden 't iezie wokken, joeno, maar mijn wijf is nogal poedie fet en aan top of dat, waai, ewerboddie raid noudees in n kar en dan wil je, als diesent piepel, ook niet zoo poer ekten. Wel, wij waren er dan ook poedie kwiek en er zaten al latse ander piepel. Bik Nik, de boetser, en Sikke Pit, de teeler, miete ik raidewee.

Nou, dat was al n nais bons, ook voor mijn wijf, want dan had die ook kompenie. En zij lijkt die woemens toch poediegoed, want Nik en Sikke hebben goed gedaan in dit kontrie, joeno, en zijn latse monnie wurt. En aan top of dat is Sikke ook nog eller en Nik heeft al 'n koppel taims gerund voor dieken. Respekvol piepel, joeno!

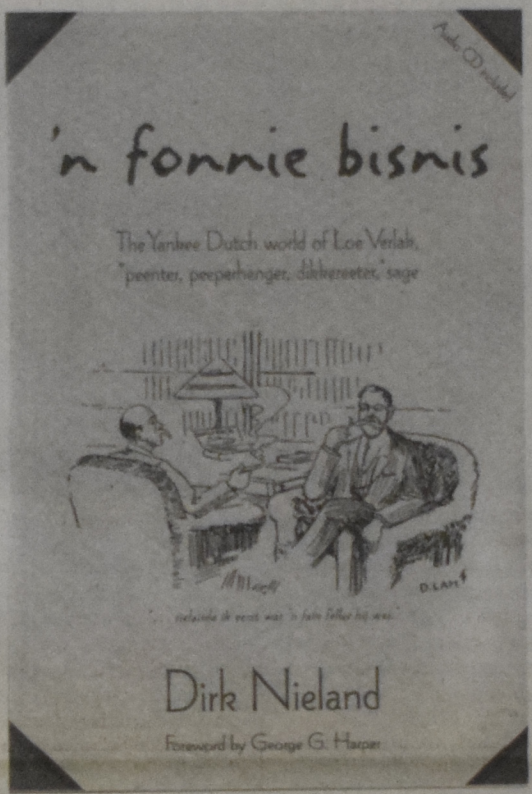
Wel, efter 'n luddel wail staarte de bisnis. Dominee preede en gafn nais spiets. 't Was over n tekst uit Prediker, geloofik, of meebie de Psalms. Somting laik dat. Maar 't was nais, dat's rielie troe. Som piepel gelooven niet in zulke sieries spietsen op n benkwet of pikkenik, maar ik zeg 't is arraid. Je voelt later dan beter om fon te maken. En je kunt toch ook niet van dominee ekspekten dat hij aan die kreezie ekterij mee zal doen.

No, ik zeg, zoo belangt het, want de wais koning Salomo zegt toch ook dat er 'n taim is om te leffen en 'n taim om te kraaien. Ja, ik zeg daar van kreezie ekten, maar, of kos, ik meen daarmee niet dat we roefhous gereesd hebben. O, no, 't was allemaal diesent fon.

De kids hebben wat gereesd en wat bal gepleed en wij, groonop piepel, hebben er op de bensjes bij gezeten en wat geleft om de kids in de toeleeked rees en wat getokt over bisnis en zoo, en Nik heeft verteld van de bik faier in de Waiming Park sjurts die hij met zijn oon aais gezien heeft. Zoodat ik maar zeggen wil dat noboddie behaind onze bek zeggen kan dat we geen diesent fon gehad hebben.

En toen met lonstaim werd het nog n lat beter. Wij zaten met dominee en jiffrouw aan de seem teebel. Zoon lang wan, joeno. Ik zat neks toe dominees Freddie, 'n Nais booike en 'n joker dat hij is. Hij dropte kwiek, toen ik niet naar hem keek, 'n piese piekel in mijn koffie. Maar veel tokken kon ik niet met hem, want evvertaim als ik hem somting vroeg, smailde hij maar en keek naar zijn sisterke aan de ander saai van hem. No, dan had ik Sikke Pit's liever gehad. Want die zat juust kietiekonner tegenover dominee en kon dus n nais tok met hem hebben. En dat had hij ook, maar, ofkos, Sikke is ook eller, en hij heeft latse moor monnie als ik.

Wel, efter de lons gingen al de groonop piepel weer op de bensjes zitten, bekos n koppel Sonnieschoel tietsers zouden ook nog n luddel spietsje geven. But als ik



n vrije dag afheb, lijk ik graag n beetje op de kouts te liggen efter ieten. Ik zeg daarom tegen Bik Nik: "Laat ons 'n luddel wail op't gras in de sjeed gann zitten."

Wel, dat was arraid toe Nik en Sikke wilde ook wel. Zoo, wij en de woemens gingen onder de tries zitten. Nou, meebie is het niet zoo polait om niet naar de spiekers te luisteren, maar wij hadden 'n bik lons gehad en, besaais, 't waren oonlie Jeek Looman, uit de hardweer stoor en Rustie Jager, de draaigoeds man, die 'n spietsje gaven. Kommen piepel laik wij allemnaal, joeno. En ze hebben sjoer niet half zoo muts monnie als Nik en Sikke, en rezzeteesjes heb ik n lat moor gegeven als zij toegedder.

Nou, 't zat daar sjoer nais in de sjeed en poediesoen deed ik joust zoo als hoom. Ik stretste mij lang uit in 't gras en meebie had ik ook nog wel n luddel nepke kunnen nemen, maar daar kroop mij suddenliek somting in't oor. Ik jompte verscheerd op en ik hallerde: "O, ik heb n bok in 't oor!" Zoo luid dat Rustie Jager even niet zijn spiets stoppen moest, omdat de piepel op de bensjes allemaal staarten te leffen.

Wel, mijn wijf heeft me toen wat in 't oor omgepookt met 'n stikje en fainelie kreeg ze er 'n bik labster van n bok uit, poedienier de saais van n piese robber aan 'n pensel.

Wel, toen dat getiekel weer over was, voelde ik wel 'n luddel bit foelies bekos de piepel by de platform keeken maar al behaind en laften. En dominee had ook al eens rond geloekt en was wat med, aigis.

Zoo, ik zeg toe Nik en Sikke: "Laat ons nu maar eens naar de spieker luisteren." Wel, dat deden we, but het leste niet lang meer.

Rustie Jager was poediesoen reddie en toen staarten ze weer met reezen. En dit taim was het ook voor groonop piepel. Wel, wat dat aanbelangt ben ik niet zoo kreezie over reezen met de leeks in 'n zak en hard runnen en al zulk gemonkie, want het is n poedie hard jaap.

Maar ze hadden ook een smook rees. En dat was zoo, dat evverboddie die meedoen wilde n sigaar kreeg en die aan moest laiten op: wan, toe, trie. Wel, ik dacht, je moet toch meedoen, als je op een pikkenik bent en een beetje bijdragen tot de fon. En aan top of dat kon je n prais winnen van 'n baks sigaren. Nou, dat was dan iezie verdiend, want ik lijk wel te smoken.

Bik Nik wou ook in de rees, but Sikke poele bek, omdat hij zei dat hij niet best strong sigaren staan kon; maar hij was freed dat het foelies leek om zijn jaap van eller, aigis. Wel, meebie zoowat n duzzen mannen gingen in een roo staan en Sjordie Vos, een van de kemittie, peste de sigaren.

Nou, ik zag raidewee dat ze 'n koppel tjiep scheeten aan de kemittie gehad hadden om de sigaren te baaien. 't Waren van die piese roops die sjoer niet meer als een

'n fonnie bisnis, by Dirk Nieland
Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids US$18.00

Our apologies to those who can't read yankee Dutch, but let's count this as part of our anniversary celebrations. A present for those who have read *CC* from the beginning, when it was still a mixture of Dutch and English.

'n fonnie bisnis by Dirk Nieland, from which this story was taken, was first published in 1929 and describes life in the Dutch immigrant community in Grand Rapids well before World War II, but it is also a good reflection of the post-WWII immigrants in Canada. The early readers of *CC* in the 50s and 60s also loved yankee Dutch stories.

The book comes with a foreword by retired Calvin College English professor George Harper, a preface by Frederick ten Hoor, pen drawings by D. Lam, a 30-page dictionary of Yankee-dutch words and – wat wij allemaal weeting voor – a CD featuring Henry Baron (another retired English professor) and George Harper reading two of the stories, plus a huge bonus: the Dutch national anthem. The latter is not translated into Yankee Dutch.

All that scholarly apparatus is almost as funny as the stories. Still, it's nice to see two retired English professors who have found a better way to spend their time than writing letters to editors to correct their English grammar. Maybe they can put their heads together and create an interim course in Yankee Dutch at Calvin College and start a revival.

Hastikke aangerekomment. Erg fonnie, hoor!

Here's a selection from the dictionary:

aiteljoe	I tell you
alle taim	all the time
joeno	you know
latse monnie	lots of money
nais bonze	nice bunch of
of kos	of course
poediegoed	pretty good
seddelfait	satisfied
senwisjes	sandwiches
sjurts	church
spietsje	short speech

Belief

The creedless driven gospel

Arie Leder

The purpose-driven literary genre rooted in the old time gospel has an equally powerful, if not as numerous, companion that seeks to add to if not replace the old-time gospel with alternate forms of Christianity.

These genres represent two sides of a contemporary battle for the Christian mind, a battle focused on the nature of Scripture and the extent and authority of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, both of whom are non-traditional: the orthodox mega-evangelicals, represented by Rick Warren and other purpose-driven authors, and a cluster of historians whose research of early Christian writings urges readers to reshape the contours of orthodoxy by allowing for "alternative christianities." Elaine Pagels' *The Gnostic Gospels*, published first in 1979, is perhaps the best known example of this genre.

In "Going Creedless. Alternative Christianities" (*Christian Century*, June 1, 2004), John P. Burgess reviews recent publications of this call to "alternative Christianities": Pagels' *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, Bart D. Ehrman's *Lost Christianities and Lost Scriptures*, and Karen L. King's *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*. Although in a completely different category, Burgess suggests that "their popular success is not unrelated" to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*.

The three authors, according to Burgess, argue that the alternative scriptures can benefit Christians today. First, a better understanding of the diversity of the early church lends greater insight into Christianity's development. Second, the diversity of early Christianity shows "that orthodoxy was never the only Christian response to Jesus' life and message." Third, the diversity of early Christianity "teaches us to honor the variety of contemporary Christianity . . . we can learn from each other. Pagels suggests that orthodoxy and Gnosticism represent not opposites but two rungs on a ladder."

Burgess appreciates the desire to learn from early Christianity, but argues that "the three authors take a descriptive claim – early Christianity contained a variety of forms – and make it prescription; there should be a variety of Christianities." He then goes on to contrast these authors' claims with Nicene Christianity, the orthodoxy they seek to relativize or even replace, in the areas of eschatology, ecclesiology, scripture, and confessing the faith.

"Many contemporary churches," Burgess observes, "couldn't care less about their Nicene heritage. Liberals and conservatives alike ignore the Nicene Creed and replace it with their own list of right belief or right practice. If Pagels and company caricature orthodoxy, perhaps it is because orthodoxy has already done such a good job of caricaturing itself."

Burgess concludes his article: "Our challenge is to rediscover the richness, complexity and vital witness of our orthodox heritage. We need to attend again to *our own* scriptures and confessions, *our own* worship and ethics, so that we may rightly praise the Triune God."

God's plan will prevail

Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer

When my children attended a Bible Study program at a local church, I decided to come along. Why drive home, I thought, when I could just sit in the back and get some writing done while I waited.

It was a great plan. However, as I sat scribbling my thoughts on a notepad in my lap, my attention was diverted by what Angie (the group leader), was saying. She had started to lead the kids in a song that used the phrase "Y2K" in it, but the young children before her didn't understand what that referred to.

Angie used a story to explain what Y2K was. She said that her grandmother was born in 1913. At that time, Angie explained, people didn't expect to live as long. When her grandfather died, her grandmother had her part of the grave marker made with the words "born 1913, died 19—".

She thought she had planned well for the future. She thought she was ready. The only problem with the grave marker was … her grandmother was still alive. She had lived past the year 2000!

As Angie concluded the story, she went on to explain how people once thought the year 2000 seemed so far away. People thought lots of strange things might happen in 2000 she said, so they made lots of silly plans.

The kids thought it was funny.

After Angie finished, I tried to go back to what I was working on, but I couldn't get her story out of my mind. I'm the kind of person who likes to have a lot of control over her life. At least I like to "think" I have control. It's never easy for me to let God lead me, or to let his will unfold.

As I sat there in the back of the room listening to the kids sing, it occurred to me that Angie's story was yet another example of what a mistake it is to think we can plan our lives, when it is God who ultimately decides. Angie's grandmother hadn't been able to plan for her death. Angie's plan to use the Y2K song didn't work out as she had planned. Even my plan to get work done while I waited fell through.

When I began to write this article it was clear that God had used me for his plan again. I wasn't there at church that night simply to wait for my kids or catch up on work. I was really there to hear his message and pass it along. I would have liked to put Angie's story from my mind and force my hand to other tasks, but his will prevailed.

Luke 12:24 tells us, "Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap…" God takes care of us.

When you feel overwhelmed by concerns for the future, I hope you'll remember Angie's story. No matter how obvious something seems to you, or how clear you think you see your plan for the future, you really have little control. So relax. God will take care of you. God's plan will prevail.

Sonnieschoel pikkenik...*...continued from page16*

nikkel gekost hadden. En meebie nog n hand vol op de koop toe in de baargen. Van die riel soort van praid van de grevvel treen, zooais mijn Jeckie zegt, als hij smaart wezen wil. Nou, we hadden dan allemaal zoo'n stoogie in de hed en 'n metsje in de hand reddie om aan de pents aan te strijken en toen riep Sjordie: "Reddie, wan, toe, trie, go," en, woeps, gingen alls leeks op in de eer en 't metsje aan de sigaar en 't was een gepuf en gesmook of d'r een oolfesjen polittekel pereed met toorts lait aan kwam.

Nou, ik deed mijn best, aiteljoe, want ik wou die baks sigaren winnen als 't passebel was. Ik smookte en pufte en poelde aan dat sigaar dat het wat een mirakel was. De smook en de joes kwamen mij soms in de troot en dan wou ik wel eens spitten, but je was niet alloud om de sigaar met de handen te tutsen, zoo, dan spitte ik maar eens saaiwees uit de konner van mijn mout. En dan maar weer puff en poelen.

Ik notisde poediesoen al, dat ik een van de beste smokers was, bekos 'n lat van de mannen die gestaart waren, stonden er nog maar kwaait bij en smookten of ze op kompenie waren en hun eigen sigaren joezen moesten.

Bik Nik was mijn tufste kompetieter. Hij was poedie kloos bij mij, maar zijn sigaar brandde ook kroeked. Zoo, dat was no wonner. Wel, fainelie waren wij de oonlie koppel die nog reesden en ik was freed dat Nik het winnen zou, want ik begon een beetje fonnie te voelen in de stommerik.

'n Middag in de Kontrie

"Wat is dat piese roop daar behain de boot?"

Maar suddenliek begon Nik be koffen en de stop sigaar flapte uit zijn mout, en hij pjoekte al over, zoodat ik genounsd werd als winner. Wel, het was ook hoog taim, aiteljoe, want toen in de sigaar wegspitte, moest ik ook nog wat van mijn lons wegspitten. Dat was wel toebed, maar ik dacht: "Nimmer maind, ik heb toch de baks sigaren gewonnen."

Zoo, dat was nais. En mijn wijf had ook poedigoed luk. Die heeft in de fet woemens rees gerund en de veurste prais gewonnen. Meebie had ze niet zoon goed sjens gehad als ze niet zoo op toe deet was, want Mizzes Molenpaard, waar ze tegen runnen moest, kon sjoer 'n lat fester als mijn wijf. Maar Mizzes Molenpaard is wat behaind taim, joeno, en weerd nog offel lang skurts. We. Ze was dan al kwait 'n wees in front van mijn wijf, toen ze suddenliek haar voet opgetengeld kreeg in haar skurts en over de kop tummelde.

Nou, aiteljoe, dat was n gelef, want toen sjoode Mizzes Molenpaard meteen aan de hool pubblek wai zij lang skurts weerde, en dat er poedienier wel 'n goed saais pik tusschen haar leeks doorrunnen kon.

Maar mijn wijf stopte niet om te leffen. Zij hobbelde maar street troe en bevoor Mizzes Molenpaard weer rait saai op gezet was had mijn wijf haar prais al. 'n Nais bik sommersosjes.

Zoo, dat was sjoer niet zoon bed dee voor onze femmelie. Wel, we hebben nog 'n luddel lemmeneed gedronken, dat gaf de Sonnieschoel toch frie voor netting, en toen zijn we wel seddelsfait weer met ons trukje hoom gereden.

Reflections

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

'And with His stripes we are healed'

I've been thinking about *healing* – physical healing. It's not a straightforward issue, even for biblically astute Reformed Christians. Jesus apparently healed all who wanted it, and even some who didn't ask for it. In our age, some of us are physically healed, and some are not, often despite communities in fervent prayer. Since we live in a world still groaning under the curse of sin, healing for others or ourselves may at some time become the familiar subject of our reiterated, anguished prayers.

A dear friend of mine in her mid-30s (I'll call her Hannah) spent the last six years with a harrowing immune-system malfunction which made her body reject nearly everything she touched and breathed in, and every food she attempted to eat. Skeletal from her inability to eat and fight infection, she was near death at various points. She now finally knows the kind of healing which allows her to be joyfully up and about again, gradually gaining strength and stamina after that long walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Some 25 years ago I myself was diagnosed with Crohn's disease (an inflammatory bowel disease). Drug treatments were eventually either ineffective or had counter-productive side-effects. So in 1987 and again in 1995 a surgeon removed part of my small intestine, a radical stop-gap measure, but no final cure. In those dark days and in difficult periods since, I too, often and in many ways, felt God's healing hand.

But now, there's something else. The fatigue that has sapped me for the last months (not related to the Crohn's) appears to have a more specific cause than I had imagined: part of my heart is not pumping as it should. (I'll spare you the medical jargon.) The problem at this point is of "mild to moderate," seriousness, as cardiological problems go. My cardiologist will no doubt tell me everything I want to know about hearts and more when I first meet her on Valentine's Day (a rather humorous irony, that date!)

A heart problem can cause gripping fear of both present and future if we lose sight of God in our trouble and confront matters without him. My heart genes are rather creaky: my father, two of his brothers, my own eldest brother and several cousins have died of heart ailments, most of them when cardiology was a somewhat more primitive art than it is now. There's a huge psychological difference, I instantly discovered, between having a chronic illness that can be "managed" and having a "manageable" but incurable defect of the organ directly responsible for keeping you alive. So once again God is reminding me to stick close to him. His healing and direction are never of merely academic or theological interest.

'Claiming' healing

Before my heart news Hannah and I had begun praying together for healing from fatigue for each of us. Hannah also prays with and participates in Bible study with some evangelical women she knows. They believe, as Hannah now does, that we who have been healed by Jesus's stripes need to *claim* that healing – physical healing too – and it will be ours. The miracles he performed during his earthly ministry are available to us if we have but the faith to ask. Biblical signs and wonders are still with us.

This approach seems heartening. At the outset it appears to follow biblical lines. Yet it places undue burden on the mind and faith of Christians who are not physically healed. And it denies the clear biblical teaching that God fulfills his purposes in our illness and suffering. Still, we Reformed folks can learn from this approach if it makes us double-check that our theologically correct view of God's sovereignty isn't leading us (as many of our fellow Christians believe it does) to a fatalistic sort of shrugging consignment of all to the will of God; a sitting-on-our-helpless-hands instead of lifting them in continual, fervent prayer that shakes heaven's gates.

Illness has no purpose?

The will of God. Ah, there's the rub. Hannah's evangelical friends would say that when illness or accident strikes a believer in Christ it is *not* God's will. It is Satan getting the upper hand, and God has nothing to do with it. They say God wills that *all* Christ-believers be healed, here and now, physically. In Scripture God inflicts illness only as a curse on unbelievers, says Roger Sapp. He is a traveling faith healer and head of All Nations Ministries. One of his books about healing is a popular summary of his views that aims to put Christians in the proper frame of mind and faith to receive healing: *Beyond a Shadow of a Doubt: Faith for Healing by Removing Doubts.*

Jesus healed out of compassion for the sick, and raised the dead in empathy for their loved ones. Yet in his compassion he was demonstrating his power, that he is who he said he is. And he was giving a foretaste of what life would be like when his Kingdom fully comes and he reigns forever as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Sometimes God still heals miraculously, and we rejoice when he does. But his Kingdom is not yet consummated. God still grants physical healing to some while others are given the grace to bear their illnesses and, finally, the calmness of spirit to pass through bodily death and into his presence without fear. And, graciously, he grants healing comfort to those of us left behind. We must recognize and rejoice in that kind of healing as well.

Grace and discipline

Not too surprisingly, the nine "doubts" Sapp presents counter much of what I was taught by Reformed parents, schools and churches. I have not figured out why God should want *physical* suffering to be off-limits for Christians. To bolster his view Sapp argues that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was not a physical malady but "a satanic angel that stirred up persecution against Paul wherever he went." Sapp doesn't deal with God's assertion to Paul when refusing to remove the "thorn": "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Discipleship forged and refined through the suffering of illness has no place in his theology. He also ignores the clear biblical fact that God disciplines (surely *must* discipline) his children whom he loves, a state of affairs human parents and teachers should fundamentally understand.

The right questions

We need to get our thinking straight lest we end up embittered towards God if he does not grant physical healing in answer to our distressed cries. Why does God sometimes grant physical healing miraculously, sometimes gradually, and sometimes not at all? Does lack of healing truly indicate a lack of faith? What role *does* Satan have in our illnesses, and where is God's will in them? How do we know when we should pray specifically for physical healing and when that time may be past, and we should pray, rather, for grace and peace in facing death?

These questions need to be put in the perspective of the *totality* of God's promises and revelation of himself in his Word. That means, of course, that we need to read and know that Word intimately. When I was younger I sometimes thought (and said *sotto voce*) that God's seeming insistence that some of his people experience total healing, and others (both of my parents, for instance) endure suffering and early death, even while church-fulls of people pray for their physical healing, is thoroughly unfair on God's part. I still can't answer, of course, why he allots some to suffer and die (and thus to praise him in heaven) and others to live long to praise him here and now. But I *can* now testify to his healing power and grace, sometimes physical, sometimes spiritual and emotional or all three. And I've come to see that that's the point!

God is in the details

From age 12 to 16 I prayed fervently, many times a day, for my mother's physical healing from cancer, even when such an outcome seemed humanly hopeless. Near the very end I was forced to pray for a different kind of healing: that God would be near her in death and also get my father and me through the grief; somehow. I realized then, and have understood far better since, the extent to which those prayers were answered. I have reaped lifelong unexpected blessings from my then enforced closeness to God. God has uncanny ways of getting us to see the wisdom of throwing ourselves on his mercy, of daily relying on his strength and care.

Now, for my heart's sake, I must particularly take that lesson to heart! And lest I fear my future, I need to remind myself that Jesus teaches us to pray for our *daily* bread; for what we need *each day*, which means not being anxious about what we shall eat, drink, wear, or whether we'll be healthy or ill.

When that's hard, very hard, when we want to vigorously disagree with Abraham ("Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" Gen. 18:25), it's helpful to re-read Job 38. It reminds us in no uncertain terms of the folly (and sheer cheeky inappropriateness) of questioning the merciful wisdom of the Almighty God who controls all things ("Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? . . . Where were *you* when I laid earth's foundations?").

We confess that *our world belongs to God*, and we must believe Jesus explicitly when he makes the astonishing claim that not a hair falls from our heads nor a sparrow from a tree "apart from the will of our Father" (Matt. 10, Luke 12). If we believe that God is truly sovereign, as Scripture teaches over and over – sometimes in ways that make us squirm – then we believe that God's will is active in *all* things, good and bad, that *all* things happen according to his purpose. Satan is immensely powerful, yet Christ has him on a chain until his final awful muzzling. Satan wreaks havoc, yet God is always, ever in control. In that paradoxical state of affairs we dare not make God the author of evil – or scoff at judgements of his which we only minutely understand. But nor should we believe that it is Satan who controls our disease and the time and manner or our deaths.

We confess with Isaiah (who hadn't yet seen the Messiah) that "with His stripes we are healed." Christ's work is finished. And yet we fall ill, fear, suffer, die. There is another "yet": our final healing. Resurrected *bodies*. Life on a new earth, the new Jerusalem where we will need no place of worship because God himself will literally dwell with us and the city will need no sun because the Lamb will be its lamp, where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away. And God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. *And with His stripes we are healed.* Indeed.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at mvantil@adelphia.net*

Business Directory

Catholic leaders lament European silence on religious freedom

STRASBOURG, France (Zenit.org) — Political, civil and Church figures criticized the silence of some European institutions in the face of the grave violations of religious freedom in the world.

The criticism was articulated today at a press conference by Mario Mauro, vice president of the European Parliament; by Father Bernardo Cervellera, director of the AsiaNews agency; and by Attilio Tamburrini, director of the Italian section of Aid to the Church in Need.

The three speakers criticized European institutions' lack of attention in the face of the growing phenomenon of violations of religious freedom in many countries.

Mauro observed: "Religious freedom is a social problem, which serves as a test to measure the level of all liberties within a state; if this one is violated, all liberties are violated."

Based on his experience as a missionary in China, Father Cervellera lamented the abduction of bishops, who have died in prison or after years of forced labor, the torture and imprisonment of Tibetan Buddhist monks, and the torture of thousands of members of the Falun Gong movement.

Treaty violations

For his part, Tamburrini, author of an annual report on religious freedom, mentioned the extent of the problem of religious freedom in the former Communist countries of Europe. He said that commitment to vigilance is needed on the part of international organizations, since it is a question of violations of treaties endorsed by U.N. member-nations.

Mauro contended that the European Parliament is often silent in the face of these enormous violations of the fundamental rights of millions of people and, yet, it makes criticisms "of an ideological character."

On 30 occasions over the past 10 years, the European Parliament has criticized the Holy See for interfering with and violating human rights, while Cuba and China have been condemned an average of 15 times for these reasons.

Mauro appealed to European deputies to take into account violations of religious freedom when concluding agreements, including commercial ones, with other countries.

European Parliament Building in Strasbourg. Members of the Parliament represent the 370 million citizens of Europe from all 15 Member States and help ensure democratic control over the running of the European Union.

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Classifieds

Wedding

With thankfulness to God for bringing them together, Eric & Evelina Hartemink and John & Betty-Anne Werkema announce the upcoming marriage of their children

Karen Elena Hartemink
and
Steven Matthew Werkema

The **Wedding** will take place on Saturday May 13, 2006 at 11 a.m. in the Aylmer Christian Reformed Church.

Anniversaries

Rev. **PETER** AND **TENA MEYER (DeZoete)**

will celebrate
50 years of marriage on May 12, 2006.

May the LORD bless you and keep you Mom & Dad.
Love from Annette (Chelsea, Cedric, Doug), John, Norman, Ray, Yolanda & Rob (Erin, Bram).

Open House on July 15, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
at Building #274 Tollendal Village,
272 Hurst Dr. Barrie, Ont.
Best wishes only please.
Address: Unit G14, 282 Hurst Dr
Barrie ON L4N 0Z3

Hoogkerk, Gr. 1946 — Grimsby, ON 2006
May 20

We joyfully announce the
60th Wedding Anniversary of

FRED AND **DOROTHY BOONSTRA**

We thank the LORD and praise him for this celebration. We pray that the LORD will continue to bless Dad and Mom. We ask him to keep them, and be gracious to them.

With love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:
Harriet & Ross James, *Australia*
Matthew
Paul & Tamone – Blake,
Brendan & Natalie – Caitlin
Margaret & Joe DeWeerd, *Waterdown*
Bryan & Geri – Trevor, Justin, Julia
Cynthia & Jeff – Chantelle, Melissa, Nicholas
Wayne & Rachel – Owen
Wilma & Ed Gringhuis, *Dundas*
Scott & Kristi – Emma, Olivia
Kim
Amy & Shawn
Gwen
Kerry & Wilma Boonstra, *Burlington*
Annette & Josh
Karen & Joe
Fred
Jenny & Stan Jaskot, *Ancaster*
Angela, Shauna, Mitchell
Wally & Irene Boonstra, *Waterdown*
John, Stephanie, Kristen
Dorothy & Brian Trebych, *Hamilton*
Gregory, Kevin

Home address: 275 – 101 Main St E
Grimsby ON L3M 5N8

Obituaries

The LORD took into his care suddenly in the twinkling of an eye our beloved son, brother and uncle

WILFRED WENDELL KUIPERS

Born January 20, 1956 in St. Catharines, Ontario
Died as a result of a farm accident
March 4, 2006 in Ingersoll, Oxford County, Ontario

Beloved husband of Dianna Kuipers (nee VanEck)
Precious father of Amber, Jordan, Logan, and Tyler
Dear son of Ted & Alice Kuipers
Older brother and mentor to: Terry & Tracy and family
Hetty and family
John Henry and family
and Tessa and family.

We hold on to the words of what the "Men of Praise" sang at Wilf's funeral "Go now in peace. Never be afraid. God will be with you each hour of every day."

We pray this especially for his wife Dianna and his children who will miss him so very much!

Correspondence: Ted & Alice Kuipers, 70 Tarry Parkway, Alymer ON N5H 3H8

JAN BOOT

Born January 13, 1925 – Kerkwerve, Zeeland, The Netherlands
Died April 7, 2006, St. Catharines, Ontario

He leaves behind his beloved wife of 55 years,
Truus Boot – de Jong
Children: Ineke Soto
Nelli & Fred VanderBerg
Trudy & Frank Jonkman
John Boot
Pauline Boot
Grandchildren and his precious great-grandchildren:
Tim & Davi Boerefyn
Jeff & Maria Boerefyn (John, Caleb, Marijka, Meagan)
Stephen & Natalie Boerefyn (Melayah and Kai)
Sarah & Irvin Stout (Isaiah and Janika)
Julia Soto
David & Kristen VanderBerg (Gabrielle)
Jamie & Elaine VanderBerg (Justin, Drew, Katya)
Natasja VanderBerg and Amy Packwood
Robert & Eva VanderBerg
Alisha Jonkman
Jonathan Jonkman
Michael Boot
Adrian Boot

The funeral was on Tuesday, April 11, 2006
at Covenant Christian Reformed Church, St. Catharines.
Donations to the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee in lieu of flowers

Correspondence: Truus Boot, 22 Simpson Rd
St Catharines ON L2N 6P4

Then I will go to the alter of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Psalm 43:4

KLAAS DERK HOLMAN

May 21, 1936 - March 30, 2006

He was promoted to glory
after a short and courageous battle with cancer.

Beloved husband of Harmke Holman
Dear father of:
Fred & Angie Holman, *Wardsville, ON*
Anita Verhulp and Fernando, *Abbotsford, B.C.*
Lois & Henry Griffioen, *Port Perry, ON*
Walter Holman & Nelia Plumstead, *St. Thomas, ON*
Angela & Gregory Skrobar, *Windsor, ON*
Dear Opa of:
Crystal (Matt) Dobson, April, Heather, Rachel (Tim) Luu, Abby (Ken) Baer, Marcia (Nick), Cynthia (Darcy), Corina, Kurtis, Janna, Samantha, Jessica, Clara, Megan, Alexander, Makena and Melissa.
Dear great-Opa of Paige.
Survived by brothers Dick (Jane), Harry (Karen), Anne (Maaike), Jan (Sjoukje) and sisters Linie (Willem) and Alie (Piet-Jan)
Predeceased by infant daughter Hilda Alice, infant son Harry Andrew, grandson Kevin and son-in-law Arnold.

The funeral was held on Tuesday, April 4, 2006
at Hope Community CRC in Mt. Brydges.
Pastor Vic Vandermolen officiated.

Correspondence address: Harmke Holman
22443 Adelaide Rd, Mt. Brydges ON N0L 1W0

Classifieds

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fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: see above
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Personals

Christian widower mid 60, dutch descent who enjoys traveling and listening to music likes to meet a lady with similar interests.
Reply to: **File # 2754 c/o Christian Courier**
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Woman in southern Ontario would like to correspond with a gentleman aged 55-60. Interested in sharing ideas and companionship.
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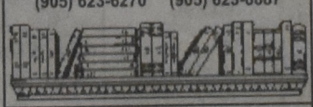

All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired, although not in the hour or in the measure, or the very thing which they ask; yet they will obtain something greater and more glorious than they had dared to ask.
... Martin Luther

Come Celebrate with us!

MR. GARRY GLASBERGEN, Principal, and **MRS. FEMMY WALPOT**, V.P. and Grade 1 teacher are retiring after this school year.
Both have taught for 39 yrs and have touched so many lives and for this we give thanks. The Jarvis District Christian School Society would like to show their appreciation on:
Date: **Friday, June 2, 2006 from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**
(Open house and short program)
Where: **Jarvis District Christian School Gymnasium**

COME CELEBRATE! the 33 year career of
MR. WILLIAM (BILL) THIES,
Wellandport Christian School Administrator.
OPEN HOUSE RETIREMENT PARTY
to be held at Wellandport Christian School on
Sat., May 27, 2006 from 1 - 4 p.m.
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If you would like to attend or be involved in the program please contact Lorraine at wcs@wellandportchristianschool.ca or call 905-386-6272.

Job Opportunities/Advertising

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We are looking for a **Youth Director** (50% position) who exhibits a vibrant personal faith, relates well to youth, shows maturity in character, and is committed to the Reformed faith.

Primary responsibilities include leading, nurturing and inspiring children, youth and young adults by word and example into a closer relationship with God and others. Applicants must be able to work cooperatively, show strong leadership, communication, and organizational skills and have some experience in leading youth programs. Ideally, the candidate should possess a B.A., including training in youth ministry, education, Bible, and theology. Musical abilities would be an asset.

Please send letter and resume to:
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or email to: **woodcovadmin@bellnet.ca**

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is seeking qualified Christian Counsellors to partner with us in advancing the purposes of the CCC as well as assist us in better utilizing our office space in the Lambeth, Chatham and Burlington areas. Anyone desiring to be a partner should subscribe to the approaches and beliefs of the CCC (see our website www.christiancounsellingcentre.ca). We are also interested in hearing from Reformed students desiring to enter the field of Christian counselling.

Please send inquiries to Jen Wagenman at
info@christiancounsellingcentre.ca
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JOHN KNOX CHRISTIAN SCHOOL in Wyoming, Ontario **requires a full-time teacher and a part-time (50%)** for the junior/intermediate grades for the coming school year.

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Please forward a letter of introduction, resume, statement of faith, and a summary of your Christian educational philosophy to the school.

Attention: **Mr. Ymko Boersma, Principal,**
John Knox Christian School
4738 Confederation Line, Wyoming ON N0N 1T0
Phone: 519 845 3112 Fax: 519 8451404
email: info@wyomingjkcs.com

Applications may be forwarded by mail, fax, or email by May 8, 2006.

PARENT PROFESSIONALS

Mutual Support Systems of the Niagara Region, a non-profit agency providing residential care and treatment for children invites applications for the position of House Parents. An ideal career choice for a married couple to work together in meaningful ministry, these are full-time, salaried, live-in positions for both partners. Our House Parents are the heart and soul of the Mutual Support program. See our web site for more program information.

Please contact: **Randy Klassen**
Associate Director-Human Resources
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rklassen@mutualsupport.net
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Ph: **905-681-0311** Email: rvanderwoerd@sympatico.ca

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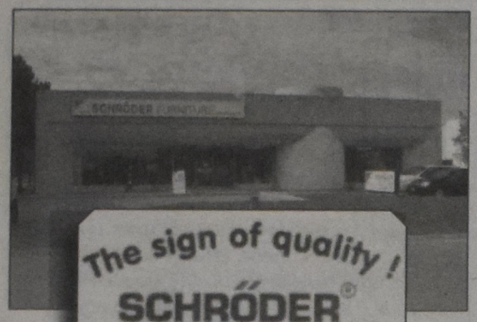
Please visit our website: christiancourier.ca for advertising information, issue dates, deadlines and job opportunities run in recent issues.

Classifieds



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TORONTO - CJMR 1320AM
Sat. 8 - 8:30 a.m.
(Zingend Geloven)
20:00-21:00hrs
(The Dutch Program)
BELLEVILLE - CJLX 101.9FM & 92.3FM
Sun. 19:00hrs
(Zingend Geloven)
19:30 (Holland Calling)
VANCOUVER, BC - CJVB 1470AM
Mon - Wed. 20:00-21:00hrs
EDMONTON, AB - CKER 101.9FM
Sat. 09:00-10:00hrs
(Religious)
10:00-12:00hrs
(50's-70's Dutch Pop Music)
11:00 (Dutch news & sports)
WINNIPEG, MB - CKJS 910AM
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb 17-19 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend at the Clarion Inn **Niagara Falls**. For more information or to register call: Jamie and Wilma Kulyk 905-987-4272 **or** E-mail james.kulyk@sympatico.ca See ad this issue.

Feb. 26 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Peter VanEgmond will be preaching.

Mar 10, 11 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep presents "Gasten in Eigen Huis" at Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock**. See ad this page for more details.

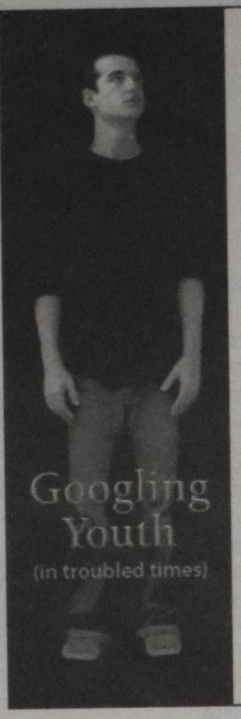
Mar 24 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep presents "Gasten in Eigen Huis" 8 p.m. at Heritage Christian School, **Jordan**. See ad this page for more details.

Apr 7-9 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend at the Travel Lodge **Kingston.** For more information or to register call: Jamie and Wilma Kulyk 905-987-4272 **or** E-mail james.kuyk@sympatico.ca See this issue.

May 6, 7 Grace CRC, **Coburg**, 50th anniversary. All invited to join in celebrations. Bi-letting available. Call 905-372-3642 or email: grace.church@bellnet.ca. Website: www.cobourggrace.org

May 6 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Saturday evening at 7:30 p.m. St. Paul's Congregational Church, 450 Park Ave. **Chatham** Tickets $10.00. Advance: 351-7151 or at the door. Information (519) 637-4357.

May 7 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Sunday evening at 7:30 p.m. Knox Presbyterian Church, 55 Hincks Street, **St. Thomas**. Freewill offering for the Canadian Bible Society. Information: (519) 637-4357.



Googling Youth in Troubled Times

A Conference for Those Working with Youth amid the Culture Wars

Prince Conference Center, Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

July 13–15, 2006

Christian families, schools, and churches often feel as if they are becoming culturally irrelevant to today's youth. How can they most effectively nurture faithful young people amid the tensions that divide, discourage, and confuse them?

This conference will draw together those involved in discipling youth to consider how to approach the spiritual growth of contemporary youth. Please visit *www.csionline.org/googlingyouth* for more information.

This conference is sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, Christian Schools International, the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning, and Calvin Workshops in Communication. Grants have also been provided by the Lilly Vocation Program and by the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, which is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

Classified Rates

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
Christian Courier is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.

RATES: (GST added to rates listed)
All personal and family announcements $6.00 per square inch
rose@christiancourier.ca
Display advertising re. businesses and organizations $8.00 per sq. inch
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PHOTOS
There is a processing fee of $25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged P.I., but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.

PERSONAL ADS
Christian Courier would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is $25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at $8 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.

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We offer a $25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in *Christian Courier* and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad.

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Christmas among the ruins

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

From December 26 till January 3, ninety Hamilton District Christian High School (HDCH) students and nineteen Redeemer University College students, as well as ten adults experienced their Christmas holiday in an entirely new setting while encountering new challenges as they assisted victims of hurricane Katrina in Gulf Port, Biloxi, and Gautier, Mississippi.

Through the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee's Service Link program they had been connected to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance based in Little Rock, Arkansas, who organized the group on location. Another service team from Tennessee joined the Ontario group in repairing damaged buildings, cleaning up rubble, and providing day care for children.

Redeemer student Terri Brunsting recalls the wreckage the group saw along the coast: "One thing that struck us was the number of restaurant signs with no restaurants in sight. Another sight that got to everyone was the number of trailers next to demolished houses, houses that at one point must have been beautiful and luxurious. There was a washed up casino barge the size of a large hotel and there were patches of trees with clothing all over the branches. We felt like mice trying to tackle an elephant. Who were we to think that we could put a dent in this mess?"

Alison remarked that she had expected the devastation to be a lot worse than it turned out to be. Apparently news reports tended to feature the worst, and a lot of the mess had already been cleaned up.

Many roofs, however, were covered with blue tarps. And many houses that looked quite normal from the outside had been completely gutted on the inside to rid the house of water damage and mold.

Students were assigned to do demolition and reconstruction work – mostly demolition by the sound of it. One team spent a large part of the mission on a high – that is, on rooftops stripping off shingles so damaged roofs could be repaired.

Emily said she got a big bang out of working with the nail gun when it came time to reshingle. Apparently she returned with all her fingers and toes intact.

Although it was between Christmas and New Year, temperatures were between 17 and 20 degrees, not bad for rooftop work.

Another team was assigned to replace electrical outlets in houses stripped down to the studs. (Hey, don't you need a license for that?!) Not everyone enjoyed doing electrical, but at least the team got to select the houses they wanted to work in, so they skipped the really dirty, smelly ones and chose some that had already been cleaned.

Though encountering much devastation, students met people whose spirits were not destroyed by the chaos because of their faith in God. According to HDCH's blog (deepsouthtrip.blogspot.com) Miss Linda, a woman who had lost everything except her family, witnessed to God's power. She told students how she had swum to a third floor balcony that had not yet been flooded, while at the same time supporting her grandchildren's heads above water in a Rubber Maid container and carrying her dog on her shoulder. Her son and some neighbors, who climbed into a boat, brought 48 people to the balcony.

When asked by students if she was afraid of another hurricane, Miss Linda replied, "Honey, when you got God, you ain't got nothin' to fear. God don't make no mistakes."

Others besides Miss Linda had an impact on the students. Brunsting relates her conversation with O.J. "When he saw the water coming in from four sides," Brunsting says, "he lay down in his upper room and went to sleep. He told me, 'I had peace.' His whole person seemed to emanate the peace of the Lord.

"It was here, in the aftermath of devastation, that I saw faith unlike any faith I've seen before. The same was seen in the Baptist church we went to Sunday morning. They praised God from the bottom of their hearts and souls. It was a sound that seemed impossible to come out of humans, so deep and rich. It was joyous and pained at once."

Brunsting adds, "We went out there to help, and we believed that we would be spreading the Word of God. They knew the Word. And if one of us left there unchanged by how we saw the Word in every person, we'd have to have a heart of stone."

See related pictures page 12.

News Digest

And the hamster shall lie down with the snake

Here's a news item for our post-election era.

Some snakes will eat only live rodents. When zoo keepers released a hamster into the cage of a rat snake in a Tokyo zoo, however, the snake did not eat it. Instead, the two became best buddies. Now the hamster often goes to sleep cuddled up against his natural enemy.

Maybe it's a sign for the Liberals and Conservatives. I'm not, of course, suggesting that either party ought to be compared to a snake. Everyone knows there are no snakes in the "bush garden" of Canada.

Adscam times two

It is becoming increasingly expensive to fire government bureaucrats. Jean Pelletier has already been fired twice from his position as chairman of Via Rail. A few months ago a federal judge overturned his initial dismissal because, well, you can't just fire somebody because another judge by the name of Gomery, after a lengthy investigation, reported that the sponsorship debacle happened in large part because of his failure to discharge his duties properly. So, after being reinstated, Pelletier was fired again.

This time Pelletier is seeking "moral damages" in the amount of $3.7 million.

It's a good lesson for politicians. Scam the Canadian people. If you get caught, you can always sue and scam them a second time – with the help of a judge.

We may be paying for the sponsorship scandal for a long time to come.

According to a post-election analyst, bureaucrats in Ottawa are trembling with fear that the Conservatives may clean house the way Mulrony did after his victory. Perhaps the analyst was misreading the symptoms. Perhaps, the bureaucrats are quivering with eager anticipation at the prospect of this kind of "separation pay."

The abused worker

Almost half of US workers suffer some sort of abuse on the job, according to a recent report. The statistic surprised me. I thought most workers felt they suffered almost daily abuse at the hands of their employers. Things must be improving.

But this isn't the point of the report. We are in an age of service industries. Most of the abuse is not coming from bosses but from the public. That's right from you, gentle public.

Over 40 percent of the US work force reported "some degree of psychological aggression" from the public while on the job. "Only" 6 percent were actually physically attacked. Most of the aggression was confined to name-calling and threats.

There's good news too in the report. It found that acts of violence against workers decreases once they're past the age of 30. Maybe by that time workers have acquired enough experience that they have learned to duck or have found good places to hide.

The empathizing brain

Research on the differences between male and female brains has produced another surprise finding. They've discovered that women tend to empathize more with someone subjected to electric shock in experiments than men. In fact, men tend to get a kick out of seeing someone jolted.

In the experiment, the person getting the shock (only a slight one) was someone caught cheating. This shows, said the story, that men are more vengeful than women. I'd have concluded that it showed that men have a strong sense of justice Or perhaps a better sense of humor (men also laugh louder when politicians slip on banana peels).

Please, ladies, don't send me any vengeful e-mails. I have quite a feminine brain. When I saw photos of Paul Martin after his defeat, I felt great empathy with the man. Until I remembered that I'll be helping to pay for his pension.